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ANANDA COOMARASWAMY

A CENTENARY VOLUME

EDITED BY
KALYAN KUMAR DASGUPTA

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PREFACE

THE Centre of Advanced Study of the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture, University of Calcutta, organised two seminars on Ananda K. Coomaraswamy for paying tribute to the master art historian in the centenary year of his birth. Both these seminars were held in the premises of the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture, the first in March, 1976 and the second in August, 1977. The seminars, which were devoted to the task of evaluating Coomaraswamy's contribution to Indology (including the study of Indian art), were attended by a large number of art historians and practising artists. The deliberations were conducted by Professor K. K. Ganguli, the then Director of the Centre of Advanced Study of the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture.

Dr. Kalyan Kumar Dasgupta, Reader in Ancient Indian History and Culture, University of Calcutta, was entrusted with the task of editing the papers read in these two seminars. These papers and a few additional ones (on subjects which were discussed but on which no formal paper was presented in either of these seminars) are now published in the present volume entitled *Ananda Coomaraswamy: A Centenary Volume*.

The papers throw light on various aspects of Coomaraswamy's genius. The learned authors have discussed his contributions to the study of Indian painting, architecture, iconography, philosophy, aesthetics, religious history and coins. The last paper brings into relief Coomaraswamy's portrait as a nation builder. However, the present volume does not contain any writing on Coomaraswamy as a teacher of art history, primarily because this topic was not at all discussed in either of the seminars noted above. For Coomaraswamy's concept of an ideal course in Indian art (sculpture and aesthetics), the readers may profitably go through the notes on his

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lectures delivered at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, in 1933. Those "who attended his course in Indian art will", in the words of a lady student of Coomaraswamy (Marguerite Beck Block), "never forget the unique quality of the experience". The relevant notes were later collected from her by S. Durai Raja Singam. He edited and published these notes in the form of a book entitled *A University Course in Indian Art* by A. K. Coomaraswamy (edited by S. Durai Raja Singam, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, 1978).

The undersigned is grateful to all scholars and artists who attended the seminars on Coomaraswamy. One of them, S. K. Saraswati, himself a great authority on the history of Indian art, is unfortunately no longer amidst us. The undersigned and the editor are thankful to the authors of the papers published in the present volume. It is hoped that this volume will help students of Indian studies in understanding Coomaraswamy.

November, 1980.

Centre of Advanced Study in Ancient Indian History and Culture, University of Calcutta, Calcutta 700 019.

B. N. Mukherjee
Director

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EDITORIAL

A pioneer historian and a master interpreter of Indian art, Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy was born in Colombo on August 22, 1877. Born of an Indian father, Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy, and an English mother, Elizabeth Clay Beeby of Kent, Ananda combined in him the best of the traditions of the East and the West and represented the synthesis of both the cultures.[1] Indeed, he was a negation of Kipling's belief that the East cannot meet the West and proved on the contrary by his life and writings that in such a meeting both can be gainers.

Sir Mutu died in 1879, when the child was with his mother in England. Lady Beeby decided to stay on in her homeland. Ananda graduated from the University of London with first class Honours in Geology. He came back to Ceylon as the Director of Mineralogical Survey of Ceylon and held this post from 1903 to 1906. His survey operations led him to discover the valuable thorianite and his dissertation connected with this new mineral won him a D.Sc. of the University of London. With this scientific discovery Ananda discovered the traditional Ceylon and her age-old arts and crafts. And more, he discovered himself : he foresaw his future in the study of the arts of Ceylon and of India, the country with which the former has been culturally integrated from the earliest times. Soon he shifted from Geology to Art and Art history. In 1910 he came to India from London, extensively toured the subcontinent and built up an excellent collection of arts and crafts. He presented his collection in the United Provinces Exhibition at Allahabad in 1911. Young Ananda dreamt of a national Museum of Indian art and approached

1. The forefathers of Sir Mutu migrated from Tamilnadu and consequently Ananda regarded himself equally as an Indian. Ananda received *Kentish* as his second name from the place of his mother.

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some eminent Indians to help him to realise his dream. He offered his own collection to a University or an institution. But none came forward to accept his offer.

As in the case of Rabindranath Tagore, help and recognition came from the West. On an invitation from Dr. Denman W. Ross, a patron of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1917 Ananda went there and with his collection was opened the department of Indian art of the Museum, now the oldest and one of the finest collections of Indian art in the States. Ananda was made Curator of this new section. In 1932 he was appointed Research Fellow and was thus able to devote more time and energy to his studies and till his retirement he worked in that capacity.

II

The intellectual journey of Ananda Coomaraswamy started with *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* and *Aims of Indian Art* (a long essay) published in 1908 and ended with *Time and Eternity* and *Am I My Brother's Keeper* in 1947. During these forty years he wrote 35 books (if the volumes of the titles like *Yakṣas* and *Catalogue of the Indian Collections in the Museum of Arts*, Boston, and the French and German editions of books like *Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon* and *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* are added, the number will exceed) and nearly five hundred research and review-articles[2]. An analysis of this enormous *ouevre* would show that roughly upto 1932 Coomaraswamy was essentially an art historian, critical and factual in approach. This period is best represented

2. Thanks to Roger Lipsey, fifty-six valuable essays written in the period 1932-1947 (some unpublished), have been brought out by the Princeton University Press in two volumes entitled *Coomaraswamy : Selected Papers*, 1977. Mr James Crouch of Melbourne, Australia, has prepared an exhaustive bibliography of Coomaraswamy's writings and a portion of his work has been published in *The Ceylon Journal of Social and Historical Sciences*, N.S. III, No. 2, 1973, pp. 54-56. Another bibliography, covering the period 1900-1942, appeared in *Ars Islamica*, IX, 1942.

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by the two-volume *Rajput Painting* (1916), *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (1927) and the two-volume *Yakṣas* (1928, 1931) and articles of the genre 'The Dance of Śiva' (1912), 'The Origin of the Buddha Image' (1927) and 'Early Indian Architecture' (1930, 1931). After 1932 he was gradually inclining towards metaphysics and theology. The representative output of this period includes books like *Elements of Buddhist Iconography* (1934), *Transformation of Nature in Art* (1934) and *Time and Eternity* (1947) and articles such as 'The Intellectual Operation in Indian Art', 'The Mediaeval Theory of Beauty', 'Vedic Exemplarism' and 'On the Indian and Traditional Psychology, or Rather Pneumatology'. During this period he was trying to establish his thesis that Art, Science and Religion, the three basic disciplines of culture and civilization, are not only inter-related, but also mutually inter-penetrated. In writings illustrative of this thesis Coomaraswamy revealed himself as a writer of rare insight, a *krāntadarśī* of Indian tradition.

From the beginning Ananda was an avid admirer of traditional arts and crafts. A disciple of William Morris (1834-96), Ananda was scornful of the soul-destroying effects of industrialism of the West. During his tours in Ceylon he noticed the gradual destruction of the traditional arts and crafts at the hands of the colonial British and this pained him much. He defended traditional arts and crafts not in a spirit of mere antiquarianism, but in the conviction that art objects of the past have a lesson for the present. He maintained that the inherent forces of the 'so-called traditions' can reinvigorate the 'industrial West' suffering from a 'spiritual void'. Ananda was, in short, firmly opposed to industrialism and colonialism of the West and lamented the blinkered imitation of every thing European by most of his countrymen.

Primarily an art critic and a historian of Indian art, Coomaraswamy achieved an integration of many disciplines. He wrote on philosophy, aesthetics, theology, rhetoric,

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linguistics, literary theories, social anthropology and numismatics, in addition to sculpture, painting, architecture and minor arts. And indeed, he seems to have set an example of inter-disciplinary study, the importance of which has of late been admitted in academic circles.

This amazing phenomenon was due not only to his ever-alert mind, sharp intellect and prodigious memory, but also to his innate passion for thinking, reading and writing. His unrelenting thoroughness in the topics he dealt with, be it art, aesthetics or numismatics, is manifest, *inter alia*, in the huge mass of references, particularly relating to literary and scriptural traditions.[3] This, along with his excellent power of exposition, was also reflected in his speeches and conversation. We are told by one of his pupils, Dr. Marguerite Beck Block, that Coomaraswamy as a teacher carried his students 'with him into an unknown, exotic world'.[4]

Apart from his colossal scholarship, Coomaraswamy was a master of several languages, ranging from Sanskrit and Tamil to Icelandic and mediaeval Latin, not to speak of modern languages like French and German. There is an anecdote that he once met a young scholar at a dinner at Harvard and when he came to learn that he was a student of Latin, he started talking with him in that language so fluently that the young man reportedly could not enjoy his dinner well. It may also be recalled in this connection that the editorial board of *Webster's English Dictionary* enlisted his co-operation for preparing the second edition of this work (1934).

As said above, the creative life of Ananda is divisible into two periods : from 1908 to 1932, and from 1932 to 1947.

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3. See, for example, footnote no. 42 of the article 'Mediaeval Theory of Beauty' in *Coomaraswamy : Selected Papers*, edited by Roger Lipsey, Princeton, 1977, Vol. I, pp. 217-18 ; and fns. 33-34 of 'Ātmayajña' *ibid.*, II, pp. 118-19.

4. Dr Block attended Coomaraswamy's 'Course in Indian Art' at the Metropolitan Museum in 1933. See *A University Course of Indian Art*, edited by S. Durai Raja Singam, Malaysia, 1978.

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Writings of the second period, described by Roger Lipsey as 'Coomaraswamy's high period', are more theoretical and conceptual than those of the earlier period and thematically a majority of them deal with metaphysics, theology, philosophy and aesthetics. The essays on art dwell more on the philosophy of art than on the art objects in their pure external form. In other words, his articles on art objects of this period relate more to their ideological background or the ideas and elements that went into their making than on their simple descriptions. We are told that during this second period Coomaraswamy came under the influence of the French metaphysician Rene Gue'non, who had exposed the inner emptiness of the West. In fact, Gue'non gave spiritual impetus to Coomaraswamy who viewed the modern world, especially the modern West, as a *cul-de-sac* and who believed that its deliverance lies in the pursuit of the ideals of the Vedic *rishis*, Gautama Buddha, Jesus Christ, Plato, Plotinus, Meister Eckhart and other great men. Personally he believed in the perennial existence of 'an ultimate universal power' within Man, akin to God. He once said : "The last end of every human activity is the knowledge of God, and it is our duty to refer all our acts to our last end."

A God-believing Coomaraswamy largely reduced art to religion and underestimated secular aspects of art. Barring this criticism I find no reason to call him 'traditionalist', 'conservative', 'revivalist' and 'anti-modern'. This, I think, is chiefly due to the lack of understanding of Coomaraswamy as a man, which again stems from the non-reading of his works. Undeniably most of his critics have read but a few of his well-known works like *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* and *Introduction to Indian Art* and have not cared to go through other books like *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought* (1946) and *Time and Eternity* (1947) and a large number of articles dealing with metaphysics, theology and aesthetics. Besides, he has been criticised on the basis of

stray passages and out-of-context statements picked up from his works. He was reportedly averse to 'modern' art, but in reality he was critical about the trend of the contemporary art which he termed 'pathological exhibitionism'. If he were thoroughly anti-modern, he would not have been impressed by Picasso's 'Guernica', or he could not have been the first Asian to recognize in Rabindranath Tagore a 'modern' painter and to make a sensitive appreciation of the paintings of the poet[5]. He was a serious student of modern European literature and was acquainted with the works of Goethe, Baudelaire and Paul Valery. He kept himself abreast of the march of knowledge in different sectors of contemporary culture, in the aesthetics of Croce, for instance, as well as in the psychology of Freud and Jung. His versatile scholarship, his manifold interests, his fruitful association with allied disciplines—all these made him a unique writer of rare intellectual dimensions.

Coomaraswamy inevitably reminds us of two other great Indians : Rabindranath Tagore[6] and Swami Vivekananda. There is proximity in their intellectual wave-lengths. While space forbids me to dilate on this point, which constitutes the subject of a separate article, it may be mentioned *en passant* that Vivekananda came close to Coomaraswamy in regarding 'art as a part of our religion'. Later Coomaraswamy intellectually established the prophetic conviction of Swamiji about the absence of the influence of Greece on Indian art by refuting the theory of the Greek origin of the Indian image of the Buddha (*infra*, pp. 60-61, 66). Again, like Tagore Coomaraswamy held that 'men have been losing their freedom

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5. Kalyan Kumar Dasgupta, 'Ananda Coomaraswamy, 'Satavarshe', Magazine Section, *Anandabazar Patrika*, 30 May, 1976 ; *Itihas O Samskriti*, Calcutta, 1977, p. 183. Also Kanchan Chakraborti in the present volume, p. 92.

6. Coomaraswamy came in close contact with Rabindranath and his cousins, Abanindranath and Gaganendranath in 1911. His encouragement to the Bengal School of painting started by Abanindranath is too well-known to be elucidated here. Coomaraswamy translated some of the poems of Rabindranath in English in collaboration with the poet and also Ajit Chakravorty ; they appeared in *Modern Review* (March-April 1911) and later included in his *Art and Swadeshi*.

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and their humanity in order to fit themselves for vast mechanical organisation', and hoped that 'the next civilization' might be based not on 'economic and political conception and exploitation but upon world-wide social co-operation ; upon social ideals of reciprocity and not upon economic ideals of efficiency'.

Coomaraswamy was Indian and Universal at the same time. Here also he came close to Tagore and Vivekananda. Though his whole life was spent outside India, he was more Indian in spirit and attitude than any other Indian (barring Tagore and Gandhi) of his times. It was his mission, as it were, to make the Indians conscious of their heritage and to dissuade them from being blind imitators of the West. By his writings and speeches (he spoke on few occasions) he endeavoured to achieve his objective and succeeded to a large extent to boost the sagging self-confidence of the contemporary Indians. His last message to his countrymen was : 'Be yourselves'. Indeed, in the Indian context he could have said like Kierkegard : "My whole life is the epigram calculated to make people aware". As a Universal Man he had an abiding faith in the undying human values and denounced barriers of all sorts—geographical, racial, and cultural. For instance, as regards different religions of the world, he believed like Blake that "all religions have one source and that no man had a right to say 'mine is the best, or only true, form of belief' ". His belief in the 'Universe of Discourse' is writ large in his works, particularly of later years. He dreamt of a people of the future who would be 'no nation, no race, but an aristocracy of the whole world, in whom the vigour of European action will be united to the serenity of Asiatic thought'.

Admittedly, as a scholar and as a man, Ananda Coomaraswamy was extraordinary. He was an Indian of the genre of the Vedic *rishis*, Sankaracharya, Rabindranath, Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. And he made us aware of the ideals epitomized by the thoughts and lives of these great

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Indians. With an encyclopaedic and ever-alert mind he authored his writings in an inimitable style marked by lucidity and precision. Indisputably he inaugurated the series of comprehensive history of Indian art. The structure of this history, as exemplified by *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, was his own making and the changes that have appeared since its publication chiefly relate to the new discoveries, and peripherally to methodologies. Imaginably, if Coomaraswamy were alive he would have written most of his works *de novo*, modifying where necessary, his views and conclusions in the light of new material and perhaps of methodology. At the same time he would not have deviated an inch perhaps from his path, allowing himself to be influenced by any extra-academic considerations. If his works, judged by modern standards, suffer from any defect, it is largely due to the inadequacy of materials he had to handle.

To regard Coomaraswamy as a mere art historian will be an incomplete assessment. He is more. He is a thinker. He is both, one and indivisible. Unlike most Indians, he did not parrot opinions of others ; he formulated his own. In the context of Indian life and identity, what Tagore did in the field of literature, Coomaraswamy did in the realm of art and art historiography.

III

The present volume, embodying fifteen articles, aim at throwing light on different aspects of the genius of Ananda Coomaraswamy. Most of them were presented at the two seminars held in connection with the celebration of the birth centenary of this scholar-colossus under the auspices of the Centre of Advanced Study, Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture, Calcutta University, during the years 1976 and 1977. The authors of these essays, all well-known in their chosen fields of studies, have endeavoured to make a critical assessment of the varied contributions of Coomaraswamy

to history of Indian art and culture and have occasionally discussed their validity and relevance in the context of to-day. These articles, I believe, are indispensable not only for appreciating a great mind and a sharp intellect, but also for a better understanding of Indian art and culture.

As to my own paper, I owe an explanation to our readers. It is relatively long. The reason is that at the time of final editing and making press-copies of the papers I found that there was no article relating to Coomaraswamy's contributions to the iconography of Buddhism and Jainism. Hence I decided to incorporate this theme in my paper on Coomaraswamy's contributions to Brahmanical iconography. In this context I regret my inability to collect papers of a few scholars who spoke at the seminars without presenting formal papers or submitted only summaries of their articles. In spite of repeated requests and reminders they did not submit their papers. At the same time I record with pleasure that K. V. Raman, Hiranmay Banerjee, N. N. Bhattacharyya, A. N. Lahiri and S. Durai Raja Singam gave a ready response to my invitation. None of them presented his paper, included in this volume, in the seminars, though the topics dealt with by them were discussed *en passant*. For instance, there was no paper on Coomaraswamy's contributions to Indian numismatics or philosophy and aesthetics or language-studies. I would have been happy if I could have included papers relating to Coomaraswamy's contributions to language-studies and social anthropology. But I had to prune my scheme owing to time-factor and financial stipulation.

IV

At the outset I must express my gratitude to Kalyan Kumar Ganguli, former Bagisvari Professor, head of the department of Ancient Indian History and Culture, and Director of Centre of Advanced Study and also the organiser of the seminars, for entrusting me with the responsibility

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of editing the present volume. I must specially thank my friend and colleague, Bratindranath Mukhopadhyay, Carmichael Professor and the present head of the department and the Director of the Centre, and Karunasankar Ray, Bar-at-law, for evincing a keen interest in the publication of the volume. Similar interest has always been shown by S. Durai Raja Singam of Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, the most knowledgeable man on Coomaraswamy ; he has not only been a constant source of inspiration, but has come forward to enrich the book by his own article and by a few photographs (including the one on jacket) of his collection ; no words would be adequate for expressing my gratitude to him. Thanks are due to all the contributors for their co-operation. I shall be failing in my duty if I would not offer my heart-felt thanks to Purnendu Pattrea, who in spite of his many preoccupations, has obliged me by preparing the jacket of the book. I must thank Srimati Jyotsna Roychowdhury for helping me in correcting proofs and Srimati Krishna Biswas for preparing the Index. Thanks are due also to Jayanta Basu of K. P. Basu Printing Works and the staff of his press, particularly to Prasanta Sen, Satyapriya Ghosh, Subhas Ghose and Dasarathi Mukherjee ; and to the staff of our Centre of Advanced Study.

I shall feel my labour amply rewarded if the book succeeds, even in a small measure, to understand Ananda Coomaraswamy and the cause and ideals he stood for throughout his life.

27 November, 1980.

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Kalyan Kumar Dasgupta

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Top

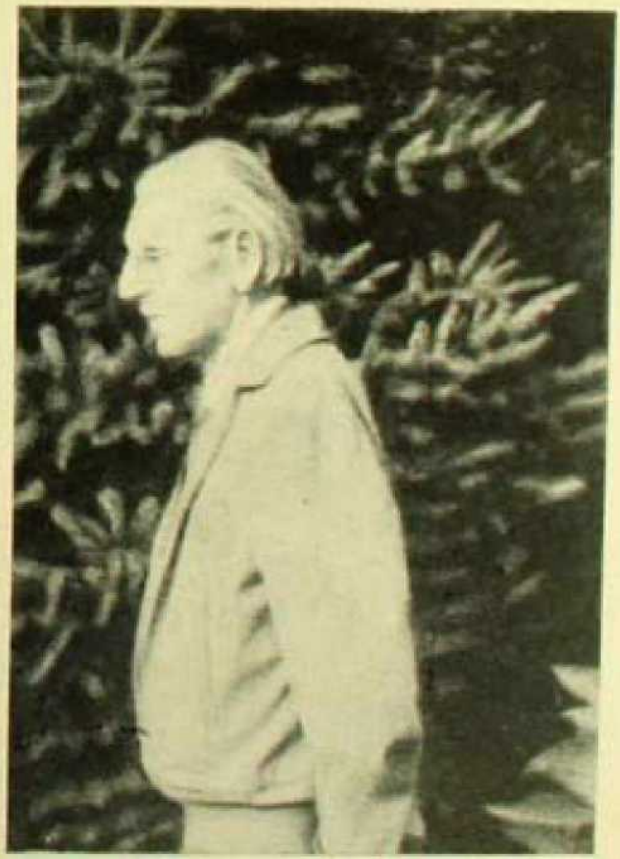
Rabindranath and Coomaraswamy in 1930

Left

Coomaraswamy in 1914

Below

Coomaraswamy in 1947



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COOMARASWAMY AND THE INDIAN ARTIST

RAJATANANDA DASGUPTA

COOMARASWAMY looms large in the eyes of the Indian artist. He holds them in an eternal bondage. It is a bondage of love, sympathy and appreciation. Both the artists and the craftsmen who produce artistic objects for a living and the obscure village woman who embroiders during the hours of her leisure inspired by the urge of creation owe a debt to the doyen of art history in India. No form of art was too low, ordinary or insignificant for Coomaraswamy's appreciation. Before him none cared to delve so deep into the field of crafts as it was thought to be too commonplace and a part of daily life. But the origins, the technique and the socio-economic implications of these crafts as well as the life of the artist and craftsman was ignored. From a *silpin* the Indian artist and craftsman had gone down to the levels of engines of production only and it was not necessary for the users of the artistic objects produced to look into the latter's life, problems and aspirations.

In the age when Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy appeared the westernised Indian turned his back at his past heritage and looked forward for everything western. The only patronage which the Indian craftsman availed of was from the native rulers ; but their number was small and their taste was also changing. The days of the Indian craftsman seemed numbered. At this crucial point there appeared on the horizon a new sun, Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy by name, who by means of his writings, revived the languishing existence of the Indian artist. The credit of bringing crafts to the level of higher arts for a systematic and comprehensive study of Indian art history goes to this messiah. Now onwards Coomaraswamy and those who have trodden

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his footsteps never forgot to take into account the crafts of the country while compiling a work on Indian art history. In his monumental work *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* Coomaraswamy assigned a considerable portion to the account of Indian crafts as they were then, and revealed their by-gone glory as well. He wrote in greater detail about the crafts in his other work *Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon* and the major portion of the work was devoted to a subject which was earlier regarded unfit for such detailed treatment.

Coomaraswamy's mixed parentage gave him a wider view of life and he did not learn to look at life or art movement as such from a compartmental and narrowly national angle. Born of Tamil and English parentage, and a Sinhalese national, he nurtured in himself a love for many cultures and hence he never wrote in a manner in which a particular section would feel elated and proved and others neglected, humiliated of misinterpreted and misunderstood. From such a man only we could expect an encyclopaedic work like the *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art.*[1] As has been said earlier, to Coomaraswamy India was not an isolated spot on the art map of the world. He wrote primarily about India but his accounts were made complete by references to the dissemination of art motifs and techniques of production of similar crafts in south and south-east Asia. Along with Buddhism and Brahminism many a craft of India was also transplanted to the lands mentioned above. Like their Indian counterparts the unknown artists and craftsmen of those areas also are held by internal bondage by Coomaraswamy. Coomaraswamy gave to the producer of these things beautiful an identity and a position in society which he never enjoyed even during the highest periods of Indian culture. He remained nameless and unaccounted for. All that was written was in the praise of his patron and the artist remained in the background.

[1] This humble writer owes a great debt to Coomaraswamy since the *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* showed him the way to write *Arts of Mediaeval Assam.*

It is a paradox and a moral sin that the Indian artist was always regarded as low in origin. He had no access to higher circles while his creations were indispensable for the contemporary bourgeoisie. The Indian artist and craftsman is a Śudra but the society that declared him so had no inhibitions to employ him for the benefit of its members and their gods. Even during the days of the Buddha the eighteen professions based on arts and crafts were declared as *hīna sippa* and its practitioners *hīna jātiyā*. During the heyday of the Mughal rule renowned for arts and crafts the artists or craftsmen were no better than slaves tied life-long and often for generations to the family of his patron who was a war-lord. The sad plight of the Indian artist of the Mughal period has been described in a touching manner by Manucci in his *Storia de Mogor*. Bernier and Tavernier do not relate a different story.

Such was the plight of the Indian artist, neglected and exploited for ages and deprived of the credit of production. Some had no doubt been well off or even rich but he had no social prestige. To such a person Coomaraswamy gives honour, sympathy and appreciation and holds him in his bondage of love. He installed the artist for the first time on the high pedestal, a place denied to him till then.[1] Coomaraswamy makes us conscious of the place of the artist in society and his contributions for the enrichment of our lives. With our newly opened eyes we look at the artist with reverence as a creator of form and not merely as an instrument of production. And with Coomaraswamy we marvel at the fact that the skill of the Indian artist is great though his tools are few and somewhat outmoded.

[1] Coomaraswamy's tribute to hundreds of anonymous artists in his *Blackfriars* (1939) may be recalled here : "... all that we know of the lives of Indian artists in any field could be printed in a tract of a dozen pages." *Editor.*

COOMARASWAMY'S APPROACH TO ART

ASOK K. BHATTACHARYA

ANANDA COOMARASWAMY'S unassailable position as an art historian depends, no doubt, largely on his extensive as well as intensive studies in Oriental art. But it seems that he is especially remembered to-day not only for his studies, but for a valued philosophy of art that he propagated throughout his life. When we go through his essays explaining and elaborating his views on art and life, we cannot but admire his courage and conviction. Courage, because he threw a challenge to art ideals that were dominating the Western world since the days of Renaissance ; conviction, for it was not merely an ego, but was developed on the basis of a sound reasoning and an unmatched understanding of the evolution of human civilization. It is almost unbelievable that Coomaraswamy counterpoised the modern European concepts of art and life that had their beginning in the quattrocento Italy by an outlook which is essentially traditional and developed by him in the course of his close examination of Oriental and Christian art of the ancient and early medieval ages. And yet he stood the test of time.

The philosophy of art, enunciated by Coomaraswamy, is not an absolute creation of his own. His role appears to have been that of an interpreter, whose utmost endeavour is to co-ordinate the scattered views of ancient and medieval ages and to arrange them in a systematic manner, with, of course, an added force of argument. His views on life and art, though hardly agreed upon, were received with respect by a section of Western intellectuals who were spiritually suffering in an environment dominated by industrial hazards and capitalist ruthlessness, and who came to recognise the inherent limitation of empirical approaches in interpreting purpose of life vis-a-vis art.

In his own approach to art Coomaraswamy attempts to salvage the artist from his present isolation, and thereby

bring him into relation with society at large, and make him responsible towards his fellowmen. Thus he disapproves the present gradation of arts, chiefly as fine and industrial, and rather falls back on the original Indian conception of 'sixteen or eighteen *śilpas*' and 'sixty-four *kalas*'. He says, "In our traditional view of art, in folk-art, Christian and Oriental art, there is no essential distinction of a fine and useless art from an utilitarian craftsmanship." Here his contempt for so-called fine art is obvious, as he qualifies it as useless, evidently, from a viewpoint of social significance. Similarly, he denounces the concept of 'art for arts sake', and says that the greater part of our boasted 'love of art is nothing but the enjoyment of comfortable feeling', for which he had no sympathy at all. In his opinion, "one had better be an artist than go about loving art". It is because "the artist is not a special kind of man, but every man who is not an artist in some field, every man without a vocation, is an idler. The kind of artist that a man should be, carpenter, painter, lawyer. farmer or priest, is determined by his own nature, in other words, by his nativity". And finally he proclaims, "No man has a right to any social status who is not an artist." By this remark, apparently somewhat sweeping, Coomaraswamy offers the broadest possible foundation to art and removes the usual barriers separating an artist from a working individual who serves his society intellectually and physically. For, to his understanding, "man's activity consists in either a making or a doing, and the making of things is governed by art". Though an idealist to the core, by asserting a clear connection between 'art and making of things' Coomaraswamy brings himself very near to the materialist who says, "Only by labour, by adaptation to ever new operations, by inheritance of resulting special development of muscles, ligaments, and, over longer period of time, bones as well, and by the ever-renewed employment of these inherited improvements in new, more and more complicated operations, has the human hand attained the high degree

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of perfection that has enabled it to conjure into being the pictures of Raphael, the statues of Thorwaldsen, the music of Paganini." (F. Engels).[2]

Coomaraswamy's views on purpose of art is equally clear. In the course of discussing "the problem of the use of art and the worth of artist to a serious society", he says : "This use is in general the good of man, the good of society, and in particular the occasional good of an individual requirement. All these 'goods' correspond to the desires of men : so that what is actually made in a given society is a key to the governing conception of the purpose of life in that society ...." Then he adds, "The artist is producing a utility, something to be used. Mere pleasure is not a use from this point of view." Thus art is not a thing to create "aesthetics" only, because, according to him, an "aesthetic" appreciation is essentially sentimental, a kind of feeling rather than understanding. "To enjoy what does not correspond to any vital needs of our own and what we have not verified in our own life can only be described as an indulgence." And in this context he records that Dante or Aśvaghosha, by their own admission, wrote with other than 'aesthetic' ends in view.

This recognition of vital role of art in life, this commitment towards its social utility over and above its 'aesthetic' value, undoubtedly places Coomaraswamy apart from most of his contemporary artists and aesthetes, not excluding the Tagores, Rabindranath and Abanindranath, to whom art's sole purpose always remained to be aesthetic enjoyment. To quote Rabindranath : "A fight has been going on for a long time round the saying, 'Art for Art's sake', which seems to have fallen into disrepute among a section of western critics. It is a sign of the recurrence of ascetic ideal of the puritanic age when enjoyment as an end in itself was held to be sinful. But all puritanism is a reaction. It does not represent truth in its normal aspect."[3]

On the point of the role of individual in the creation of art, too, Coomaraswamy appears to be in total disagreement

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with Rabindranath. The poet writes : "There is yet another man in me, not the physical, but the personal man ; which has its likes and dislikes, and wants to find something to fulfil its needs of love. This personal man is found in the region where we are free from all necessity,—above the needs, both of body and mind,—above the expedient and useful. It is the highest in man, this personal man. And it has personal relations of its own with the great world, and comes to it for something to satisfy personality." But in counteracting this view, as it were, Coomaraswamy avers : "Our conception of art as essentially the expression of a personality, our whole view of genius, our impertinent curiosities about the artist's private life, all these things are the products of a perverted individualism and prevent our understanding of the nature of medieval and oriental art. The modern mania for attribution is the expression of Renaissance conceit and nineteenth-century humanism ; it has nothing to do with the nature of medieval art, and becomes a pathetic fallacy when applied to it." "Thus the works of traditional art, whether Christian, Oriental or Folk-art, are hardly ever signed ; the artist is anonymous, or if a name has survived, we know little or nothing of the man." It is because to a traditional artist the operation is a rite, he neither intentionally nor even consciously expresses himself through his work.

"The anonymity of the artist," adds Coomaraswamy, "belongs to a type of culture dominated by the longing to be liberated from oneself. All the force of this philosophy is directed against the delusion 'I am the doer'. 'I' am not in fact the doer, but the instrument ; human individuality is not an end but only a means." Here he refers to a passage of the Buddhist text, *Dhammapada*, in which it is told that "to wish that it may be known 'I was the author' is the thought of a man not yet adult". And this attitude towards anonymity is still found prevailing in the community of the Shakers, who made perfection of workmanship a part of their religion, but made it a rule that works should not

be signed. "It is under such conditions," concludes Coomaraswamy, "that a really living art, unlike what Plato calls the arts of flattery, flourishes ; and where the artist exploits his own personality and becomes an exhibitionist that art declines".

It is not altogether unlikely that the state of modern art, that prospers in its extreme individualism since the beginning of the present era, prompted Coomaraswamy to express this view. And, surprisingly, here he comes again to a very close proximity of a propagator of socialist realism, namely Maxim Gorky,[4] who says : "We all know the part played by private property in the splitting up of the community and the development of a self-sufficient ego. This process meant not only the physical and mental enslavement of the people, but also a decline in the vigour of the popular masses, the gradual destruction of the admirable, spontaneously poetic, creative mentality of the community which in the past had given the world the finest examples of artistic creation." He further adds that "Art is within the powers of the individual, but only the community is capable of true creation. It was the Greek people who created Zeus, Phidias only carved him in marble".

Thus we note that a true idealist, to whom art is inseparable from, or rather a part of, the socio-religious life of a community, finds a support from a materialist whose chief concern is also the good of the community. The objective condition that brought these two humanist thinkers of divergent ideas so near to each other has, however, been provided by the capitalist world by turning art into a commodity of trade and the artist a manufacturer of that commodity.

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INDIAN SCULPTURE AS VIEWED BY COOMARASWAMY

KALYAN K. GANGULI

ACADEMIC study of Indian art has been a recent development. In fact before Indian art came to the purview of people of discerning taste in Europe very little notice was taken of Indian artistic heritage lying scattered all over the sub-continent. Gradually, however, the Europeans became increasingly interested in the traditions of this country. Their attention had also been drawn to the rich heritage of visual arts surviving in India from a very ancient age. Some notice of Indian art, particularly image of Indian gods and goddesses as also of renderings of animal figures by Indian artists, came to the taken by interested people in the West. The account may be opened with the well-known assessment made by John Ruskin of Indian sculptures, representing Indian gods and goddesses, as known to him. It was, however, not a very tasteful evaluation even acceptable to other European authorities.

After the establishement of Asiatic Society in 1774 in Calcutta, sculptures from different parts of the country started to come to the galleries of the Society in unending stream. Many specimens of sculpture could not however be brought to Calcutta because those could not be removed bodily from the sites of their discovery. In such cases the finds were reported in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society* and this had made possible a wide publicity of the art products of the country and art materials outside India, particularly in the countries in Europe, which were increasingly turning into colonial powers. In neighbouring countries, where Indian culture found a very welcome state of development, the French were simply astounded to discover the Indianesque art heritage in their empire in Cambodia, while the Dutch

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were overwhelmed by the astounding monuments of Borobudur and other places. The figure of Buddha migrating from India to wide areas in Asia became a veritable challenge to the western intellect.

As assessment of Indian art, particularly of sculpture had already been started by European authors by the end of the nineteenth century. Western authors like Foucher and Grunwedel made a detailed study of Gandhāra sculptures and published their findings and assessments of this art apropos Indian art in the well-known books, *Buddhistische Kunst in Indien* (1893) and *L Art greco bouddhique du Gandhara* (1905-14) respectively. Here in India of course the British Civilian, V. A. Smith, had taken up the challenge of studying the Indian artistic heritage and finally produced his *magnum opus*, the *History of Fine Arts In India and Ceylon.* Though the great archaeological explorer Alexander Cunningham along with his devoted band of workers were making an excellent spade-work for studying Indian art by bringing to notice numerous sculptures from ancient archaeological sites of India, Smith's volume remains even today a pioneer work in the field of evaluation of Indian artistic traditions including sculpture. A final say about Indian art, its possible origin, influences from Hellenistic, Roman, Persian and Central Asian sources, etc., and the quality of technique after encouragingly spoken of had been the outcome of the endeavours of Cunningham as evaluated by Vincent Smith. What remained for Indian scholars to do was to follow the direction indicated by the European authorities and work out the details of the local, regional and characteristic elements in Indian sculpture.

It was at this stage that Coomaraswamy appeared in the field. Undoubtedly he had made a thorough survey, examination and scrutiny of the tradition of Indian sculptural art to find out the basic and inherent characters of this tradition. It was he who for the first time brought to the academic world the panoramic vista of Indian artistic tradi-

tions, first in his *Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon* and later in his monumental work, the *History of Indian and Indonesian Art.* He took an absolutely independent stand in evaluating the sources, the inspiration, the techniques and the spirit of the artistic endeavours made by the people of India. His pioneering work in this field was his dissertation on the 'Origin of the Buddha Image' wherein he had brought to the notice of the scholarly world the fact that Indian sculptural art was no product of model study, but had been memory-work, solely dependent on observations mentally made and conditioned by experience of thinking and divination.

The form which had been received from nature by men and women of this world has been to Coomaraswamy a creation of unsurpassable artistic bearing. But, it was to be taken note of, that the human form had grown into a columnar shape as a result of continuous endeavour in order to look and to reach the above. This endeavour had been fairly well summarised by some philosophical speculators in India as stated in the dictum : "The Indians conceived of gods and paid them respect, but finally they themselves conceived their own individual self (*ātman*) as God himself." This unique claim on the part of the philosophers in India led Coomaraswamy to the visual perception of human form as evolved in Indian art fused and integrated with a philosophical perception of extremely high order.

This outlook of Coomaraswamy in the evaluation and assessment of Indian sculpture gradually evolved and expanded to serve him as a bed-rock upon which he had tried to establish the whole cosmic realization of the Indian mind and the art evolved by this mind.

This dynamic re-appraisal of Indian art, particularly Indian sculptures, stands to be thoroughly understood and fully worked by the student of Indian sculpture so that the real and basic nature of Indian sculpture may be understood by art-loving people. In establishing his thesis Coomaraswamy,

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however, did not, by any stretch of imagination, ignore the scientific measures used by the Western world for evaluating art. As a matter of fact he had a thorough knowledge of European, ancient Asian and Egyptian, as well as Chinese traditions. And he had not made any mistake or allow loopholes to enter the logic of his evaluation. This can be established when one proceeds to take note of the analytical process used by Coomaraswamy in establishing his thesis.

It is well-known that Coomaraswamy, who was academically trained as a geologist, turned to the pursuit of appreciating and evaluating art through his acquaintance with the extremely rich panorama of the arts and crafts spread over and practised in Sri-Lanka, then known as Simhala (Ceylon). The overwhelming influence of the visual splendour witnessed by Coomaraswamy disenchanted him from the pursuit of minerals and compelled him to take a headlong plunge into an uncharted sea of vision full of forms and shapes of unending variety. The bewildering medley of forms which he encountered in the art workshops and breath-taking monuments of Sri-Lanka urged him to take a pilgrimage to India, the source of origin of this vision of art and his journey to the sub-continent made him feel within himself an unsatiable craving for wider and wider comprehension of the surviving art treasures of the country and drink deep at the fountain of Indian creative impulse revealed through the pursuit of the unknowable visualised in the field of art. His acquaintance with the sculptures in the Indian Museum, Calcutta and his wide travels to the museums and art-centres of India opened before him a whole vision of the artistic manifestation in India, a world of significant realisation and a varied and animated representation in visual form. Since then he had engaged himself to understand, evaluate and interpret Indian art with a devotion and dedication like a true *yogī* involved in work (*karma*).

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There was a challenge from the West where it was claimed that the image of the Buddha made for the first time in the ateliers at Gandhāra was of Graeco-Roman affiliation and this had been accepted without any reservation. This theory, which had remained long unchallenged, was controverted with adequate logic by Coomaraswamy in 1908 before a big gathering of scholars in Copenhagen. It was claimed by him unequivocally that in spirit and realisation the Buddha figure produced in Gandhāra was far removed from the image of Buddha produced in the studios of Mathura containing the seeds of all future emanations of divine images conceived and produced in the Indian tradition. In this connection one may remember how the entire range of Indian sculpture is sometimes held on European standards as mere carvings amounting to non-sculpture. This viewpoint was not overlooked by Coomaraswamy but he was not a bigot. He had rightly viewed the sculptural value of the "magnificently conceived figures of colossal Yakshas from Besnagar, Parkham, Patna and Didarganj, bearing immense material force in terms of sheer volume", and "astounding physical energy" which characterise the inherent sculptural quality of these figures, truly in the European sense[1]. He had rightly pointed out that there was "no suggestion here of introspection or devotion". That was "an art of mortal essense", almost brutal in its affirmation", having nothing 'spiritual' about them. But there was already an attempt at transition towards what was being aimed at in the creation of sculpture. With the emergence of the personalised cult of *bhakti* a strong demand was being felt for an icon and among the Buddhists (and also the Jainas) the foot-print, the *dharmachakra*, or the sacred tree had been given visual form to call for the presence of the worshippable. The Garuḍa pillar at Besnagar probably indicates that among the devotees (*bhaktas*) of the Vaishṇava faith symbols had evolved to

[1] Coomaraswamy A. K., *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (henceforth *HIIA*), p. 16.

evoke the presence of the object of devotion. The transcendance from abstract symbol to image did not remain a far cry for long. By the first century A.D., Coomaraswamy could prove almost mathematically, that the grossly materialistic figures of the Yakshas were transformed into the spiritualised image of the Buddha.[1] "The wide distribution of the Mathura type and the fact that it was locally copied show that it was regarded as the orthodox model." By the Gupta period whatever material aspect inherent in the image of the Buddha was reduced to the likeness of the human form but in every other aspect the image was transformed into a spiritual realisation of the *dhyāna* concept rendering a material form into an idealistic receptacle. The transformation of the sculptural tradition in India was complete.

Since this time sculpture in India continued to reveal experiments in visualisation of ideals of *nāma* and *rūpa*, as "manifestations of the essential nature of non-being."[2] This change in the ideals of visualisation which characterised sculpture in India transcending as image (*pratimā*), had continuously exercised Coomaraswamy to look into the depth of of the Indian mind which had made strenuous and unending efforts to bring into the field of vision the ideals realised within through long meditation.

This is where Coomaraswamy had made his mark in interpreting the ideals of Indian art expressed through various visual media such as architecture, painting and sculpture. Nowhere however, the Indianness of these media had been more manifest than in the field of sculpture where the norms pursued in the West were completely overridden and an entirely new perspective was brought into play.

Though art known mainly from Buddhist of Jaina monuments of Bharhut, Sanchi, Bodhgaya, Bhuvanesvar,

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

[2] Coomaraswamy A. K., *Transformation of Nature in Art* (Dover edition, henceforth *TNA*), p. 158.

Mathura had been illustrative and anecdotal individual figure sculpture had also been practised from a fairly early date as would be evident from representation of figures on punch-marked coins existing from at least the 6th century B. C.[1] Such figures may have continued throughout ages as massive free-standing figure like that of Bhima set up at open spaces in different parts of the country would prove. But for higher society use for such artistic exercise was no longer held in demand ; and by and large plastic forms were felicitated either as images or as ornaments on temple walls. In both cases little was left in common with the conception of volume, one of the foremost qualities of sculpture from the western point of view.

Coomaraswamy had made a sustained endeavour to justify this Indian attitude towards sculpture and a crystallised view of the savant may be found in his essay on 'Origin and use of images in India' in the book, *Transformation of Nature in Art* (p. 155f). This essay has made the Indian idea about image singularly explicit and clear and calls for reverential consideration for a proper understanding of the Indian view of art. Since the emergence of the image Indian mind had felt no further requirement of art purely for visual satisfaction or aesthetic pleasure. The image was evolved from the icon, a *yantra*, a means for a purposeful realisation. It started with artistic formulation of the imagined appearance of the deity for worship as may be conjectured from the figure of the Yakshas as represented upon the railings at Bharhut, or the figures of gods found upon the punch-marked coins. Those figures could be held as analogous to the icons of the Pagan gods of Graeco-Roman tradition, though visualised long before India's contact with the Roman-Hellenistic world.

From the western point of view Hinduism is a polytheistic system but Coomaraswamy argues that the Indian icon "was not in any sense a fetish". But Coomaraswamy

[1] *HIIA*, p. 43.

proceeds to point out that to hold Hinduism as polytheistic was apparent to the western student due to his Graeco-Roman concepts of Paganism. In fact, Hinduism in its true sense was far from polytheism ; in truth, it was essentially monotheistic, as *Brahman* is held as the supreme godhead and all other deities as manifestations of that ultimate *Brahman*. And that supreme godhead "passes the description of words, not comprehensible by the mind, not visible to the eye or other senses". This aspect of godhead, evolving from the Vedic times, through the *Upanishads*, became more and more evident and realised giving rise to concepts of a number of astute philosophical contemplations. The Mahāyāna Buddhists went a step further to contemplate the ultimate as manifest in the doctrine of the void. In his interpretation of the *Upanishads*, Śaṅkarāchārya, the greatest exponent of Monism in India, was the creator of the philosophy of Vedānta in which technically there exists no scope of attachment of individual deities or images thereof. In this concept there is no scope for visualising the ultimate *Brahman* which is the only truth, as having any form, who is beyond the reach of words, all other being untrue and illusion (*Māyā*, i.e., *Brahma satya, jagat mithyā*). Yet it is well-known that the same great savant Śankarāchārya had composed hymns in eulogy of such deities as Śiva, and such sacred river as the Gaṅgā. And also it is well accredited that Śaṅkara never failed to offer his *pūja* to deities installed in temples. Coomaraswamy had taken particular note of Śaṅkara's attitude towards the conception of gods in Brahmanical tradition and his endorsement of "the inevitability of the use of imagery, verbal and visual" and his 'sanction of service of images'.[1] Yāska, the ancient interpreter of the Vedas had rightly said "we see actually that because of the greatness of God, the one principle of life is praised in various ways ; others are the individual members of a unique self" (*Nirukta*, VII, 4).

[1] *TNA*, p. 160.

In fact this was the philosophy which enacted the evolution of the conception of individual deities from one supreme godhead, and which deities, though held as individuals, were deemed as one with the ultimate and deliverers in their own individual right. Evidently the gods conceived from as early as the days of the Vedas gradually evolved as mirrors reflecting the greatness of the supreme godhead revealed and conceived in numerous aspects bestowing boons and benedictions in an unending flow of mercy. The abstract spirits inherent in nature conceived in the Vedas soon came closer to their conceivers in anthropomorphic form having head, arms, body and legs, with expressions in face and implements in hands. Soon the abstractness in conception gave place to concrete visual renderings found represented upon the punch-marked coins as well as the coins issued by Kanishka about the first century A.D. Foundations of iconolatry were thus firmly laid. Coomaraswamy observes : "Iconolatry, however, was not left to be regarded as an ignorant or useless practice fit only for spiritual children. A human necessity was recognised, the nature of the necessity understood, its psychology systematically analysed, the various phases of the image worship, mental and material, were defined, and the variety of forms explained by the doctrines of emanation and of gracious condescension." The forms of the images are not arbitrary. It has been rightly observed by Śukrācharya : "The characteristics of images are determined by the relation that subsists between the adorer and the adored". An image of a deity emerges from the formless and the invisible to the constituted form and a visible state of existence.[1]

Indeed, Coomaraswamy had left no stone unturned in order to explain how mere form in sculpture had transcended into *pratima* or the image and how the formulae laid down in the Śilpaśāstras conditioned the visual appearances of such *pratimā* produced under strict canonical requirements. When the worshipper proceeds to give shape to the form of the

[1] Deussen, P., *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, pp. 99-101.

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deity visualised in his deep meditation (may be held by non-believers as imagination) even he has to keep in mind the dictates laid down by ancient seers guiding the creation of images. "Images made as directed with all their members complete, are attractive and merit yielding ; those otherwise are destructive of life and wealth and ever increase sorrow. Images of *devas* are productive of good and heavenward leading (*svargya*) but those of men or other (creatures) lead not the heaven".[1]

This exercise of the Brahmanical mind to bring the formless and the invisible into the realm of form and visibility by way of creating images has been an extremely complicated and esoteric one. There are numerous śāstric directives explaining this complex phenomena but they are not always intelligible to the common man. The Hindu may have inherited through continuous mental contact and visual perception some inkling of this very complicated understanding but to the western intellect it has always remained an enigma. It is no wonder that the old and traditional sculpture in India other than religious, is rarely secular and there is handly any sculpture in the real sense of the term. Coomaraswamy made it quite clear that, though this sculpture produced in India from about the first century A.D. would pose enigmatic to the western eye, a little effort to understand the inner message of these images would open unto them a vista of limitless vision capable of bringing unto the earth-bound ephemeral human mind an expanse of the ethereal joy of unison with the Cosmos. The image of the Indian conception is a *bimba*, which reflects the glory and exultation of the unknowable in a perceivable shape, contemplating upon which a human being can raise himself to a state of elevation not quite possible by any other endeavour that one may undertake.[2]

[1] *Śukranitisāra*, tr., IV. 4.73.

[2] Cf. his remark : "The Hindus do not regard the religious, aesthetic and scientific standpoints as necessarily conflicting, and in all their finest work, whether musical, literary or plastic those points of view, now-a-days so sharply distinguished are inseparably united". *Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon*, p. 17. *Editor.*

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COOMARASWAMY AND INDIAN PAINTING

D. P. GHOSH

ANANDA COOMARASWAMY was a versatile genius. He was an author of enormous erudition, combining in himself an art historian, philosopher, orientalist and linguist. One of the greatest Orientalists of all times, in his several monographs, he either established or revolutionised entire fields of art, with almost an unmatched understanding of all facts of traditional culture. He covered the philosophic and religious experience of the entire pre-modern world, both eastern and western and for him primitive, mediaeval European, Indian, Classical experiences of truth and art were only slightly different dialects in a common universal language. I think his greatest contribution lies in his masterly exposition of the community of theory behind mediaeval European and Asiatic art. For both "art is religion and religion art, not related but the same".

It is a matter of common knowledge that in the nineteenth century Western art critics and scholars, steeped in post-Renaissance European art failed to comprehend the religious and sipritnal content of Asiatic art. Even the great Vedic scholar Max Müller bemoaned the absence of any aesthetic principles in the doctrine of the Hindus ; the famous art critic Ruskin opined that Indian art with its hydra-headed and many-limbed image was bizarre and grotesque in the extreme. Coomaraswamy in his provocative writings based on aesthetic facts of the Indian, Chinese, Japanese and even the aniconic Islamic art correlated with Byzantine and Gothic art of mediaeval Europe, for the first time, completely exploded the modern Western conception. As observed by him : "Asia has remained herself, but subsequent to the extroversion of European consciousness and its preoccupation with surfaces, it has become more and more difficult for European minds to understand the Asiatic point of view".

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Although he follows step by step the landmarks of Indian painting in his *magnum opus, The History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, published in 1927, it may be observed without hesitation that the *Transformation of Nature in Art* (published from Harvard in 1934) dealing with Indian aesthetics was undoubtedly his finest. Discriminating readers of his "History" must have received the impression that Coomaraswamy was more concerned with archaeology and history than art. In the *Transformation of Nature in Art*, the reader gains his first impression of real art. His mastery of the subject is astonishing but more inspiring is the deep understanding which lies behind all his quotations. The absolute identity of the mediaeval European and the Indian aesthetic theories is striking enough, the foremost among them being is that an artist is not a copyist or imitator of Nature (as Aristotle would have it). Coomaraswamy sums up the Indian and Chinese theory of art as follows : "What are probably the most significant elements in the Asiatic theory are the views (i) the aesthetic experience is an ecstacy in itself inscrutable, but in so far as it can be defined, a delight of the reason and (ii) that the work of art itself which serves as the stimulus to the release of the spirit from all inhibitions of vision, can only come into being as a thing ordered to specific ends".

Coomaraswamy not only discusses the whole problem of symbolism in Indian art (*pratīka*) from the Vedas, Upanishads, and Vedāṅga and specially the Śilpaśāstras, he was the pioneer in unravelling the mysteries of Indian art, its esoteric language of aesthetic imitation, the representation of the invisible by the invisible in a masterly way particularly, *sadṛiśya, pramaṇa* and *ābhasa* in Indian painting with corresponding relevant analogies from Chinese and Japanese aesthetic theories and art manuals. According to him, "all art thus tends towards a perfection in which pictorial and formal elements are not merely reconciled but completely identified. The Indian or Far Eastern icon, carved or painted,

is neither a memory image nor an idealization but a visual symbolism, ideal in the mathematical sense". In this connection his analytical study of the technique and theory of Indian painting from the 'Chitrasūtra' chapter of the *Vishṇudharmottara-Purāṇa* of northern India which may be assigned to a date between 450 and 650 A.D. and the 'Chitralakshaṇa' section of Śrīkumāra's *Śilparatna*, a South Indian text of the sixteenth century A.D., two of the most valuable treatises on Indian painting and aesthetics, are also memorable.

The highest place amongst all forms of art, has always been assigned in India to Painting, whether secular or devotional. Painting also came to be regarded as the earliest form of all artistic representations. Even for purposes of worship, an image, produced by painting, was regarded as the most appropriate, in that the deity was believed to come near the conception of the votary, because beauty, ornamentation, display of sentiments, and the like, could be vividly displayed by means of painting alone.

"Sculpture and painting in India are closely connected. Sculpture is the primary art and painting comes up to it with its own means", says Stella Kramrisch. "The interconnection and collaboration of the two is preserved nowhere as clearly as in the large Vaiṣṇava cave, Badami and also in cave II, Ajanta". According to Coomaraswamy, "of the four kinds of painting, intellectual, lyrical, secular and mixed, it is clear that work at Ajanta belongs to the two first. For in ideal or intellectual (*satya*) we have primarily to do with representations of angels and heavens, the Buddha and Bodhisattva figures and perhaps the ceiling paintings representing the heavens of Pañchikā. These hieratic paintings are directly or indirectly based on *sādhanas* or *dhyānas*. In lyrical (Vaiṇika) paintings, corresponding to Kāvya in literature, we have to do mainly with events and scenes taking places on earth and with human protagonists ; the Jātaka paintings are of this kind". He further observes : "One can well understand what is meant when it is said that to under-

stand painting, a knowledge of the dramatic dance (*nṛtya*) is essential. For in these days the language of gesture (*abhinaya*) has long been codified on the stage"...."We do not know positively who painted the pictures ; the possibility of monkish workmanship is not absolutely excluded but it far more probable that painters permanently attached to the foundation were employed, or that a guild of painters (*Chitrakara-śreṇī*) was called in, as in secular practice.

Coomaraswamy discovered two periods of painting at Rang Mahal Cave, Elura : the first contemporary with the excavation, of late eighth-century date, reminiscent of Ajanta, less sensitive, the later decidedly inferior but expressive of an altogether new style, viz., the mediaeval. This discovery was of far-reaching significance. "The most important composition of this later style represents Viṣnu and Lakṣmī riding through the clouds, borne by Garuḍas, which are of human type, though with very long sharp noses, bird-like lower limbs and small wings... It is of special interest to observe that quite apart from the Garuḍa faces, the features are sharply defined and the long sharp nose and the bulging eyes of the later, Gujarati style are unmistakable ; in other words this is already a definitely mediaeval style, and considerably removed from that of Ajanta".[4] It may be pointed out by me here that the sharp, angular, linear, mediaeval style also is manifest in Pāla and Sena manuscripts of Bengal. Also there is now no question that it penetrated from Bengal to Nepal and Tibet in North and Burma and Siam in South-East Asia, ultimately culminating perhaps in the Wayang style of East Java. So the Elura murals of the second phase

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[1] Coomaraswamy A. K., *Transformation of Nature in Art*, Dover edition, New York, 1956, p. 3.

[2] Kramrisch's 'Paintings at Badami,' *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art* (henceforth *JISOA*), IV, no. 1, 1936, Calcutta, p. 59.

[3] Coomaraswamy, 'The Painters' Art in Ancient India : Ajanta', *JISOA*, I, 1933, pp. 27-28.

[4] Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, London, 1927, pp. 100-101.

mark no doubt a watershed in the classical art of India. For this we are indebted to Coomaraswamy.

Of the voluminous scholarly works of Coomaraswamy mention may be made of one of the earliest and best, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* (1908), and his pioneering works of some of the variegated facets of Indian art, viz., *Catalogue of the Indian Collections in the Museum of Fine Arts*, Boston. (1) Introduction, 1923, (2) Sculpture 1923, (3) Jaina Paintings and Mss., 1924, (4) Rajput paintings, 1926. Although a large number of scholars are now engaged in carrying out research of the peculiar characteristics of Rajput art, now broadly divided into Rajasthani and Pahari styles which again have been classified recently into multiple and sometimes confusing numbers of local and regional schools, Rajput art as a whole was not systematically explored before Coomaraswamy. Ever since his first publication on *Rajput Painting* in 1916, he devoted himself assiduously in revealing the beauties of his particular school of paintings. According to him, the method of drawing, specially in the early Rāgamāla series, is analytic, the form is built up of separate highly conventional elements and acquires its meaning only by the grouping of these elements ; it is an art of the strongest possible convention. These are, moreover, essentially paintings architecturally established by their colour, for which the drawing, however brilliant, is merely a support. In later Rajput art on the other hand, under the influence of Mughal painting, the forms are built up by means of fully infected outlines and even if colour is added, all essentials are established by drawing itself ; the colour is far more delicate than before and there is a very evident naturalism.[1] Hermann Goetz is of opinion that Coomaraswamy discovered Rajput painting as a perfect expression of the ideals which India had to offer to humanity. Before the appraisal and appreciation by Coomaraswamy most of these paintings were first

[1] Coomaraswamy, 'Notes on Rajput Paintings', *Rupam*, Calcutta, Nos. 13-14, 1923, p. 73.

brought to the notice of collectors by art dealers whose statements about their place of origin had to be vague and unreliable for commercial reasons or due to indifference.[1]

In his last years Coomaraswamy delved with more intensity in his own thought, the great traditions of the West and the great tradition of the East, just as he felt that such a merging must take place in the world at large. In his 70th birthday, in the fulness of his life and belief, in a talk at his Boston dinner he expressed his hearts-yearning to retire and finally settle in India, his spiritual home. But that was not to be. This unique figure, six feet tall, handsome and distinguished, passed away in America. India lost a *ṛishi* and the West a seer.

[1] H. Goetz, 'Notes on some Schools of Rajput Paintings', *JISOA*, V, 1937, p. 160.

COOMARASWAMY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF INDIAN PAINTINGS

TARAN KUMAR BISWAS

THE present writer hails from the city of Banaras where Dr. Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy wanted to build up somewhere 1910-1911 an art gallery primarily with his rich collection of Indian paintings and drawings which he collected in course of his tour in northern India during the autumn of 1910 and expressed his intention to serve as its curator. It was just after the All India Exhibition which was held at Allahabad and in which Coomaraswamy was entrusted to organise the fine arts section. A printed appeal was circulated to arouse public opinion for building up the said art gallery but unfortunately its response had been unexpectedly very poor. However, the Trustees of Museum of Fins Arts, Boston, when offered, accepted that invaluable collection of Coomaraswamy and eventually a notable gallery came into being. Professor O. C. Ganguli is absolutely correct when he remarks that "the loss of India has been an invaluable gain to America and again to the access in prestige and understanding of Indian art in the west".[1] Bhagavan Das while paying homage to Coomaraswamy regretted with much pain in his heart that this great scholar in the year 1916 desired to serve the Banaras Hindu University in the capacity of a Professor of Indian Art and Culture but 'it was not possible to get him one'.[2] Thus in Banaras we missed him first as a Curator of an art gallery and secondly, we could not avail of his services as a Professor of Indian Art and Culture. Indeed, it had been a great loss.

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[1] Ganguli, O. C., in *Homage to Ananda Coomaraswamy*, edited by S. Durai Raja Singam, pp. 92-93.

[2] Das, Dr. Bhagavan, 'My Reminiscences', *ibid.*, p. 311.

Incidentally, this great savant took a different recourse to serve the cause of Indian art. He discovered the truth, beauty and significance of Indian art and inspired many Indians and foreign scholars to look at Indian art with another eye. Of the many such inspired persons, Rai Krishnadasa, the present Honorary Director of Bharat Kala Bhavan had been one. Rai Sahib attended the Allahabad exhibition and was inspired by Coomaraswamy to such an extent that immediately on his return to Banaras he started seriously collecting objects of Indian art and by 1920 Rai Sahib established Bharat Kala Parishad in Banaras which included a museum of art. This museum is known at present as Bharat Kala Bhavan, a museum which is nationally and internationally famous especially for its rich collection of Indian miniatures. Thus in the nucleus of Bharat Kala Bhavan there lies the encouragement and inspiration of Coomaraswamy. He not only inspired but was quite anxious about the growth of Bharat Kala Bhavan. His anxiety and his appreciation have been reflected in one of his letters addressed to Rai Krishnadasa. He writes :

"Dear Rai Sahib Krishnadasa,

I have seen the pictures which you have collected for the Bharata Kala Parishad. They are for the most part of the later Pahari type and should be supplemented if possible by some of the older Pahari paintings, and the earlier types of Jaipur art, especially the early Rāgamāla pictures. In other words you have begun a most valuable work of preservation and conservation, which I hope your Society will have the funds to continue on a larger scale.

In Mr. Sita Ram's collection you have, I think, the best collection of Mughal paintings in India and perhaps in the world.

It will be a great advantage to the public if these can be exhibited and it will be an excellent thing, too, if you can prepare a well illustrated catalogue.

It will be desirable also to acquire some example

of Jain illustrated mss. and if possible some old examples of illustrated Nepalese mss. as well as sculptures, of which you have already a very fine example in the Kārtikeya.

Some of Ram Prasad's Omar Khayyam pictures are interesting and original conceptions, especially the shadow show.

You should also hold up a reference library for all students of Indian art.

With congratulations on your work,

Very sincerely,
Ananda Coomaraswamy

P.S. You have already acquired some excellent Mughal paintings : that one by Bishandas seems to me especially good and valuable."[1]

The present writer does not know how many museums and museum personnel received such inspiration from this great genius. Coomaraswamy refers to the rich collection of Sita Ram Shah of Banaras in the above letter. Unfortunately, some of the paintings of this collection have been recently stolen and have not yet been traced. However, Shri Sri-Prakasa while paying homage to Coomaraswamy gratefully acknowledges that 'it was he who first discovered the beauty and significance of many old paintings we had in the family'.[2]

Coomaraswamy had been very prompt in replying letters specially when some problems related to art and philosophy were posed before him. He never avoided. His letters always contained valuable information. The present writer met very recently in Banaras, Thakur Jaideva Singh, an octogenarian scholar of Indian music and philosophy in his residence, who at one time had maintained regular relation with Coomaraswamy through letters. Unfortunately most of the letters of Coomaraswamy addressed to him are now

[1] The original letter is now in the collection of Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras Hindu University.

[2] *Homage to Ananda Coomaraswamy*, edited by S. Durai Raja Singam, PL. XVII.

lost for which he feels extremely sorry. However, he told the present writer that as he was not very happy about the Sanskrit meaning of the word *lāvaṇya,* he had requested Coomaraswamy for its original root and probable meaning of the same. Coomaraswamy had been very prompt and suggested to Jaidevaji to look for its meaning in the Prakrit word *lona* which means butter. Thakur Sahib was pleased with the information since he could now co-relate term *lāvaṇya* and its related meaning. Similarly Thakur Sahib was interested about the real explanation of the word *mārga* since the word often seen used by him in case of classical music *mārga-saṅgīta* and classical painting *mārga-chitra.* To Coomaraswamy the term *mārga* comes from the word *mṛiga* and possibly related to hunted animal. Hunter watches the drops of blood along the jungle pathway and follows it and ultimately reaches to its hunted animal. The *mārga* is thus the cultivated path which leads to the ultimate goal. In this connection, it may, however, be mentioned that some of the explanations of technical terms by Coomaraswamy were not accepted by scholars in the field of which mention may be made of V. Raghavan, Professor of Sanskrit at the Madras University. The explanation by Coomaraswamy of the word *rasachitra* could not satisfy Raghavan, who in his own way explained the same with the help of *Śilparatna* which Coomaraswamy gladly accepted. But on other occasion Raghavan corrected his explanation of the words like *sādṛiśya* and *anukāra* by the correct suggestion of Coomaraswamy.[1] Coomaraswamy always encouraged such intellectual exchange of ideas among the scholars.

Coomaraswamy should be regarded as one of the pioneers in the study of Indian paintings. His two-volume work on Rajput Painting was published by the Oxford University Press in 1916. Coomaraswamy started writing this book long back. In his letter to Sir Rothenstein he said : "I am

[1] Raghavan, V, *ibid.*, p. 9.

very sorry when I wrote the big books I did not quite realise the relative importance of the Rajput school. Now I see it is really the great thing and the other in spite of wonderful and beautiful qualities lesser I did not want to say this then either because it might have seem (and ... unfortunately even now may seem) Hindi prejudice. I am quite sure of it and the conviction has grown quite slowly and surely in me." In this book, the great scholar has himself claimed that "no separate work on Rajput Painting has yet been published and no contributions to its study have been made by other investigators, this is therefore a pioneer work and as such may fairly claim the indulgence of later student who will discover many errors of commission and omission." What Coomaraswamy predicted that happened eventually. His errors have been pointed out by W. G. Archer in his *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills.*[1] One should not, however, forget that Coomaraswamy brought out these volumes when materials were scanty, but some of his observations have not lost their validity even after the discovery of more data pertinent to subjects.

In these volumes, he gave an account of the Hindu paintings of Rajasthan and the Punjab Himalayas from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, He has defined 'Rajput' painting without any ambiguity and has pointed out how does it differ from the Mughal school. In fact, the European scholars were confused before the publication of this book and could not distinguish between the Mughal and Rajput paintings. Coomaraswamy pointed out that the Rajput paintings have descended from the tradition of wall paintings, whereas "Mughal painting is characteristically an art of miniature. To Coomaraswamy "Mughal art is secular, intent upon the present moment and probably interested in individuality. It is not an idealization of life but a refined and accomplished representation of very magnificent phase of it, it is dramatic rather than static ; young, fond of experiment and ready to

[1] Coomaraswamy, Ananda K., *Rajput Painting*, p. 6.

assimilate. It is splendid and attractive but it rarely touches the deep springs of life ..."[1] Whereas "Rajasthani painting just in the vernacular poetry of Hindusthan it is the folk art fused with hieratic and classic literary tradition that emerges as the culture of the whole race, equally shared by kings and peasants."[2]

In this way Coomaraswamy has brought forward many more points of distinctions between these two types of paintings for which European scholars like Raphael, Petrucci and Laurence Binyon.[3] In this great work, Coomaraswamy divided his studies into two directions, viz., the 'Rajasthani' Schools and 'Pahari' Schools. His discussions on the characteristics of each school attracted the attention of many art lovers in the West and Basil Gray considered Coomaraswamy's Rajput Painting 'as an epoch in the appreciation of Kangra painting in the West'.[4]

In this book Coomaraswamy not only discussed the subject matter and several texts which furnished the themes of the paintings but also supplied information with regard to the technique and treatment of Rajput paintings. Interestingly enough, he has included a note in this book even for correct pronunciation of the technical words.

The students of art history in particular and museum personnel in general will remain ever grateful to Coomaraswamy for his multi-volume *Catalogue of the Indian Collections in the Museum of Fine Arts*, Boston, of which three catalogues are related to Indian Paintings. The *Catalogues* were published by the Harvard University Press. The *Catalogue of the Jain Paintings and Manuscripts* was printed in 1924, *Rajput Painting* in 1926 and the *Catalogue of Mughal Painting* came out in 1930. O. C. Ganguli is quite correct when he says that these *Catalogues* by Coomaraswamy

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[3] Ganguli, O. C., in *Homage to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy* edited by S. Durai Raja Singam, II, p. 96.

[4] Gray Basil, *ibid.*, p. 121.

are 'unsurpassable models for museum inventories'.[1] The museum personnel who are engaged even today in the preparation of *catalogues* of art objects, should learn the methodology of preparing catalogues from the models prepared by the eminent scholar. It appears from these catalogues that Coomaraswamy had been very meticulous and extremely careful in writing catalogues of each and every object. If we just look one of his catalogues, for instance, of Mughal painting, we will see that Coomaraswamy gives the accession no., describes the objects, deciphers the inscription, dates the same, gives the dimension, refers the original name of the collection, suggests to consult the related texts and published articles which bear connection with the object and when possible he gives a plate of same. Coomaraswamy had been well aware of the fact that the future scholars will consult his *Catalogues* for many information and in order to reconstruct the history of India's past. A slightest mistake in a catalogue, he knew, would lead to the distortion of the fact and the history reconstructed on that information would fail to project a correct history. Hence he took extreme precaution in preparing these catalogues. His *Catalogues* not only include the description of each of the paintings, but all the three *Catalogues* give us a plethora of information. For example, in his *Catalogue of Rajput Painting* Coomaraswamy discussed the features of different schools in Rajput painting, themes of Rajput paintings, list of donors, index of deities, and index of registration numbers. Thus each of his *Catalogues* in the Fine Arts Museum, Boston, is a mine of information which will ever guide scholars in the field.

Between 1910 and 1912 two series of Indian Drawings were published by Coomaraswamy, basically, for the members of the Indian Society. His first book includes discussion chiefly on Mughal drawings and the second monograph deals chiefly with Rajput drawings. His entire observations on Indian drawings are based mainly on his personal collections.

[1] Gangoly, O. C., in *Homage to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*, p. 97.

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In these two series Coomaraswamy studied the methods of Indian drawings, nature of paper on which drawings were worked out, Jaipur cartoons, paper tensils and coloured powder etc. In Mughal drawing, the author discovered the miracle of microscopic brush works while in Pahari brush outline, he found something most alluring, swift and effortless movement. To him Mughal sketches aimed at greater roundness and modelling, while Pahari drawings suggest the living form beneath the drapery.[1] The Rajput drawings, according to Coomaraswamy, "provide the indianist, with an encyclopaedia of information of customs, costumes, architecture, and above all, religion and they are well deserving to study from these points alone. On many matters, they are only source of information". Besides, in the second series of his *Indian Drawings*, Coomaraswamy has underlined the folk elements in Rajput painting. Thus for studying basic structure of Indian drawings and for learning the methods and techniques of the same, these two series by Coomaraswamy may serve as the guides on which students in the line can move further.

Coomaraswamy published his book *The Transformation of Nature in Art* in 1934. This book includes seven thought-provoking articles of which 'The Theory of Art in Asia', 'Reaction to Art in India', 'Aesthetic of Śukranītisāra' and 'Parokṣa and Ābhāsa' are replete with references to Indian paintings. Besides, there is a glossary of Sanskrit words in which the learned author has supplied meticulously accurate philosophical interpretations of technical words which often confuse the students in the subject concerned. Furthermore, in this book he has pointed out the 'Canon of Chinese painting (*Hseih-ho*)'. He also discussed *Chi-yun* (*Chetanā*), *Shen-tung* (*Prāṇa*), *Yun* (expression) and *Ssu* (resemblance) and has tried to find out the relation between Indian and Chinese canons of painting. The *Transformation of Nature in Art* has thrown much light on the grammar of Indian painting.

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[1] Coomaraswamy, A. K., *Rajput Painting*, p. 7.

Coomaraswamy's other books include *History of Indian and Indonesian Art, Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon, Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art, Introduction to Indian Art, Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, etc., have innumerable references to Indian Paintings. In chapters XII, XIII and XIV of his small book *Introduction to Indian Art* (1923) Coomaraswamy succintly yet effectively introduced the essential features of Mediaeval Buddhist Painting, Jaina Painting and Rajput Painting. These chapters give us an elementary idea about these paintings. His *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* contains observations on several aspects of Indian and Greater Indian paintings and may perhaps be regarded as the best for those who seriously intend to enter the said fields. His *Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon* (1913) is still 'perhaps the best general survey in handy form' about the arts and crafts of India and Ceylon.

Besides these books, Coomaraswamy published valuable articles on Indian painting. In *Journal of Indian Art*, No. 127 of 1914, he published his article entitled 'Notes on Jaina Art'. He claimed in this article that this was perhaps the second article on Jain art. The first article on the subject was by Dr. Huttemann who wrote on the 'Miniaturen zum Jinacarita' based on the Collection of Berlin Museum. In his article Coomaraswamy gave an introduction to the subject and discussed on Jainism, narrated in brief the Life of Mahāvīra and other Jinas, story of Kālakāchārya and he also gave explanation of various terms, explained cosmology and wrote about the aesthetic and relationship of Jaina paintings. Besides, he also discussed the illustrated manuscripts and described the plates which he published alongwith the article. In *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 2 of 1927, Coomaraswamy wrote a small article on 'Notes on Mughal Paintings' which was in fact 'a contribution to Mughal iconography' and discussed in it the portrait of Aurangzeb of Worchester Museum, a portrait of Jahangir in his personal collection, portrait of Adil Shah II of Bijapur in Freer Gallery, Washington, two portraits of

Kabir, one in the collection of British Museum and the other one in the collection of Fine Arts Museum, Boston. The *Ars Asiatica*, Vol. XIII of 1919, was devoted to the study of the Oriental Miniature in the Goloubew Collection by Coomaraswamy, published on behalf of the Fine Arts Museum, Boston. The text is in French and its LXXXVIII plates which contain 157 figures are extremely interesting for the study of the same subject. In 1931 Coomaraswamy published a small article in *Eastern Art*, Vol. III, on 'An early passage on Indian painting'. He discussed with his vast understanding in the subject, a passage from *Aṭṭhasālini* and explained many terms related to paintings *such as chitta-charaṇa, chitta-tara, chitta-karaṇa, chitta-krama, atichitta*, etc. and in his another article in *Ostasiatisch Zeitscrift*, of 1926 he published his ideas about frescoes of Ellora. In his *Selected Examples of Indian Art*, he published forty-two plates, of which fifteen plates were on paintings. Earlier work on Hindu Mythology used to select third-grade materials for which Indian art in the West earned reputation as of inferior quality. Coomaraswamy was very much perturbed with such occasional remarks and as such he brought out this portfolio selecting meticulously the beautiful specimens of Indian art and personally supervised their processing in the press and presented the true nature of Indian art which involved at once deep understanding, of beauty and extra-ordinarily skilful manoeuvre. In his books and articles, Coomaraswamy has always supplied 'forest of footnotes' and without them no article by Coomaraswamy is ever complete. In his book *Transformation of Nature in Art* he has furnished one hundred and seven footnotes. These notes on the one hand project his vast range of studies and on the other it helps researchers in the field to avail of handy information on various subjects.

Coomaraswamy was not only concerned with ancient and mediaeval Indian Painting but he kept a watchful eye on the development of modern Indian paintings. He reviewed

in 1912 the Calcutta paintings and 'while admitting the gratefulness of their lines, he bewails their lack of vitality'. To him "they are often sentimental in conception, weak in drawing and *tamasic* in colouring".[1] He criticised Ravi Varma's art and 'pointed out his vulgarity'. To him Ravi Varma's gods and goddesses in spite of their several arms and heads were very human and that too not of noble type.[2] Coomaraswamy inspired Mukundi Lal, an expert on Garhwal painting, to become Abanindranath's disciple since he regarded Abanibabu as a true Indian painter who painted things based on classical Indian tradition. Thus in his life-time, he criticised the weaknesses of modern Indian paintings which had been always a constructive criticism and inspired younger generations to follow the ideal path if they were interested in having perfection in their endeavour. The Tagores inaugurated the Bengal School and brought in renaissance in the attitude of Indian art but the task of explaining the significance, beauty and the truth of Indian art was largely undertaken by Coomaraswamy. He penetrated deep into the subject and discovered the truth behind it and preached the same in India and abroad. Coomaraswamy wrote that 'the Hindu writers say that the capacity to feel beauty (to taste *rasa*) cannot be acquired by study but it is the reward of merit gained in past life' .... and Coomaraswamy had definitely gained such merit which helped him in his amazing penetration into the subject and in discovering the imperishable underlying truth behind Indian art. We should thus remain ever grateful to this great genius, and Sir William Rothenstein is absolutely correct when he writes, "today if India takes her due rank as first class artistic power, it is in large measure owing to Coomaraswamy".

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[1] Rama Rao, P., 'His conception of Art' in *Homage to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*, edited by S. Durai Raja Singam, II, pp. 285-86.

[2] According to Coomaraswamy, 'theatrical conception, want of imagination and lack of Indian feeling in the treatment of sacred and epic Indian subject' are the 'fatal faults' of Ravi Varma's works. *Editor.*

ANANDA COOMARASWAMY AND STUDY OF MUGHAL PAINTING

ASOK KUMAR DAS

BABAR, the founder of the Mughal dynasty, was a poet and romantist who dreamt for establishing an empire worthy of the glory of his illustrious ancestors. He succeeded in laying down the foundation of an empire of his own after overcoming many obstacles, but did not live long enough to revive the old Timurid glory, the credit for which goes to his grandson, Akbar. In course of his half-a-century long reign Akbar not only enlarged that empire to an extent unimaginable to his grandfather, but also succeeded in creating a glorious culture which was in every respect comparable with that of his Timurid forefathers.

Painting was an important part of Akbar's cultural achievement. By effecting a perfect synthesis of Persian norms, Indian tradition and expertise, with his personal taste and ideas he was able to develop a style of painting that was unique in every respect. It became as much as a part and parcel of India's artistic heritage, as the Mughals themselves became an integral part of Indian history. Being products of an atelier which was personally organised and supervised by the imperial patron, Mughal paintings were from the day of their execution objects of high value and rarity. This remained true till the closing years of Shah Jahan, after which the exclusiveness of the court art no longer existed. For nearly a century from Akbar's succession almost the entire output of the Mughal studio was reserved for the emperor. Only on rare occasions the emperor presented a picture or an illustrated manuscript to some favourite prince or noble or a friendly ruler. A handful of nobles like Abdur Rahim Khan-e-Khanan maintained their own library and atelier.

The English ambassador Sir Thomas Roe had great difficulty in collecting an authentic likeness of Emperor Jahangir and the one he could finally procure for sending to England was rejected by Jahangir as a bad likeness. The emperor was generous enough to present Sir Thomas a good and authentic autographed portrait drawn by his favourite painter, which pleased the Englishman very much.

Mughal paintings, therefore, did not have to suffer the lot of earlier schools of Indian painting which remained hidden in remote caves of the Deccan, Western Ghats or Central India, or in the depositories of monasteries or *jñānabhaṇḍaras* in isolated places, to be altogether forgotten by the posterity. Mughal paintings bound in splendid *muraqqas* and sumptuously illustrated manuscripts formed part of the booty of such ruthless scourges as Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali, used as gifts to secure commercial or diplomatic favour and sold and exchanged for cash or kind as soon as the power and glory of the proud Mughal race started to wane. In the early eighteenth century a large part of the imperial collection of paintings and illustrated manuscripts found their way to Jaipur, Oudh, Lucknow, and Patna, and also to Tehran and Istambul. Some materials belonging to the nobles of Jahangir and Shah Jahan were collected by enthusiastic traders and collectors from whom some of these even reached the eminent Dutch Master Rembrandt Van Rijn and famous English bibliophile Archbishop Laude between 1635 and 1645 A. D. It may be mentioned here that the well-known album of Golconda portraits preserved in the Rijks Museum, Amsterdam, was collected in 1686. The *Gulistan* Ms painted in 1628, now in the British Museum, came as a present to King Charles I of England in 1638 and the *Shah-Jahan-nama* in the collection of Queen Elizabeth II in the Windsor Castle Library in the later part of the eighteenth century. At about the same time the paintings used for decorating the Millionen Zimmaren of Empress Maria Theresa of Austria in the Schlosse

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Schonbrumm, outside Vienna, reached Europe. During the second half of the eighteenth century when the Mughal Libraries of Delhi and Agra were systematically ransacked British governors like Lord Clive and Warren Hastings and officials like Edward Pote and bankers like Richard Johnson succeeded in building up collections of Mughal paintings and Persian manuscripts. Many *muraqqas* and manuscripts carried to Persia were brought by European diplomats and traders from that country : the well-known Jahangir album in the Berlin State Library, the *Babur-nama* fragment in Moscow, the album of Mughal and Persian paintings in the Museum of Asian Culture, Leningrad, the *Hamzanama* folios in the Industrial Art Museum, Vienna, the dispersed folios from the same manuscript sold in the 1920's in the U.S.A., and the collection of the Ouseley Brothers were all procured from Persia. Some Mughal materials like the *Jami-ut-Twarikh* ms, and the major portion of the Jahangir Album known as the *Muraqqa'-i-Gulshan* and other albums are still perserved in thc Gulistan Palace Library, Tehran. The same process continued for the succeeding decades, as a result of which we find more Mughal paintings and manuscripts in the museums, libraries and private collections in Europe and America, than what survives in Indian Collections.

In spite of their wide appreciation and appeal no methodical study of Mughal painting was made by the early collectors. The Surgeon-General of Jaipur Dr. Thomas Holbein Hendley was fortunate enough to examine and study the finest of all Mughal paintings—the paintings of Akbar's personal copy of the *Razmnama* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the collection of Maharaja of Jaipur. He later exhibited the former work in the celebrated Jeypore Exhibition in 1883 and published all its paintings in a deluxe volume in the following year. Hendley, however, relied mostly on the existing records of Jaipur Pothikhana and did not have the inclination or opportunity to study Mughal painting in its totality, though his studies on the Mughal treasures of Jaipur and Alwar, published

in the form of papers and deluxe volumes, are undoubtedly pioneer works in the field. That task was left to Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, one of the greatest art-historians of our time.

II

Inspired with the zeal to discover the richness and glory of our artistic heritage after his momentous meeting with Sister Nivedita and the Tagores in Calcutta in 1906 Coomaraswamy took upon himself the task to acquire as much knowledge as possible in this subject.[1] That was the time when E. B. Havell was building up the collection of paintings for the Government School of Art, Calcutta, and Percy Brown for Lahore, and Gaganendranath Tagore acquired a rare collection of Mughal and Rajasthani drawings from Patna. Patna was a key-centre in this respect as J. B. Elliot amassed his specialised collection of fine Persian classical manuscripts in the nineteenth century and Justice Khuda Bakhs accumulated his fantastic collection of Arabic and Persian manuscripts including many gems like the unique illustrated copy of the *Khandan-i-Timuriyya*. P. C. Manuk and Diwan Bahadur R. K. Jalan built up their interesting collections of paintings and decorative arts in the early twentieth century.

Coomaraswamy's first two publications in 1910, *Selected Examples of Indian Art* and the first volume of *Indian Drawings* (*Chiefly Mughal*), were published from England for the India Society where he was inspired by the famous British artists, Sir William Rothenstein and Eric Gill. In the Introduction of *Indian Drawings* he wrote :

> "I also trust that the growing recognition of the value of Indian aesthetic ... may contribute towards a more intimate relation of this teaching to the traditional culture

[1] It may be noted here that Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita were admirers of Mughal paintings. As Sister Nivedita wrote in 1909: "There is a marvellous quality of truthfulness and imagination in the Mogul portraits." *Collected Works of Sister Nivedita*, III, Calcutta, 1967, p. 36. *Editor.*

of a country that has given beauty to the world in so full a measure."

Both the works contained a fair number of Mughal paintings and drawings. Mughal painting was not regarded by him as a foreign art idiom practised on the Indian soil under the patronage of a foreign dynasty. Nor did he think that Mughal art was wholly derived from or fully dependent on Persian Art. He felt too much allowance has been given for foreign elements in Mughal painting, much of which are in fact Indian. He proved that Mughal painting was deeply rooted in the rich and varied indigenous tradition and closely related to the contemporary Rajput painting tradition. Though this contention was never fully accepted by a large number of scholars who continued to use such terms as Indo-Persian or Indo-Saracenic, with the discovery of a mass of new and interesting materials in recent years we now realise how prophetic was Coomaraswamy's earlier ideas and contentions.

In course of his long tour across the Indian sub-continent starting from the summer of 1910 undertaken mainly to organise an exhibition of Indian arts and crafts at Allahabad, he not only visited the important centres of art and examined the public and private collection, but also collected a good number of drawings and paintings and gathered much new information about the painters and their method and technique of work. As a direct result of this long tour Coomaraswamy was able to grasp the true perspective of the entire panorama of Indian Art. He became a pioneer in the study of Rajput painting, by which he meant both Rajasthani and Pahari paintings, and published a series of illuminating papers on that subject. His *magnum opus* in this branch, *Rajput Painting*, was published in 1916, which helped to transform the outlook of the Western world by creating a new awareness of Indian painting.

In the field of Mughal painting he started to make deep and penetrating studies on individual examples and groups,

their forms and contents, their technique and iconography and also on their relative aesthetic merits. His articles, 'Originality in Mughal Painting' and 'Night Effects in Indian Art' published in 1910, were written in that vein.

Considerable interest in the field of Islamic art, which included the works of the Mughal workshop, was created by the great exhibitions *Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst* at Munich in 1910 and at the Muse'e des Arts Decoratifs, Paris in 1913. The four-volume Catalogue of the Munich exhibition by Friedrich Sarre and F. R. Martin, *Die Ausstellung von-Meisterwerken der Muhammedanicher Kunst in Munchen, 1910* (Munich, 1912) and the deluxe tomes by G. Marteau and H. Vever, *Miniature Persanes* (2 volumes, Paris, 1913), the magnificent works by F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Paintings and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey* (2 volumes, London, 1912), and P. W. Schulz, *Die Persisch-Islamische Miniaturmalerei* (2 volumes, Leipzig, 1914) created widespread awareness of Islamic art which included Mughal art. Vincent Smith took more than passing notice on Mughal Painting in his *History of Fine Arts in India and Ceylon* (Oxford, 1911) and E. B. Havell eulogised Mughal workmanship in his books *Indian Sculpture and Painting* (London, 1908) and *Ideals of Indian Art* (London, 1911).

In most of these works illustrations were given greater prominence, often completely outweighing the text which were mostly sketchy and sometimes erratic. The reason was not far to seek : serious study of Mughal painting did not gather sufficient momentum before Coomaraswamy appeared on the scene with his first-hand knowledge, perfect understanding and extraordinary zeal.

In India also there was an important exhibition on Indian Art held in 1902-3 at Delhi, and on the occasion of the Coronation Durbar at Delhi another large exhibition was organised in 1911 which included many fine Mughal paintings collected by George Watt and Percy Brown from the Princely States. Just at that time Coomaraswamy was making his long fact-

finding-cum-collection tour in which he was joined by Sir William Rothenstein. After accumulating a good many Rajasthani and Pahari drawings and paintings his attitude towards Mughal painting underwent thorough transformation. In his letter to Rothenstein in January, 1911 he wrote[1] :

"I am very sorry when I wrote the two big books I did not quite realise the relative importance of the Rajput school. Now I see it is really the great thing and the other (Mughal) in spite of its wonderful and beautiful qualities, lesser. I did not want to say this then either because it might seem (and unfortunately even now may seem) Hindu prejudice. However, I am quite sure of it and the conviction has grown quite slowly and surely in me." [1]

In his monumental work, *Rajput Painting*, published in 1916, he summed up his views on Mughal painting in the following words :

"Mughal art is secular, intent upon the present moment, and profoundly interested in individuality. It is not an idealisation of life, but a refined and accomplished representation of a very magnificent phase of it. It is splendid and attractive, but it rarely touches the deep springs of life. Its greatest successes are achieved in portraiture, and in the representation of courtly pomp and pageantry. All its themes are worldly and through sheer intensity of observation—passionate delineation—sometimes raises individual works to the highest possible rank, yet the subject matter of Mughal art, as such, is of purely aristocratic interest."

Eulogising Rajput painting he further wrote :

"If Rajput art at first sight appears to lack the material charm of Persian pastorals, or the historic significance of Mughal portraiture, it more than compensates in tenderness and depth of feeling, in gravity and reverence.

[1] K. R. Towndrow, 'Sir William Rothenstein and his Indian correspondence', *Art and Letters*, 1951, XXV, pp. 17-18.

> Rajput art creates a magic world where all men are heroic, all women are beautiful, passionate and shy, beasts both wild and tame are the friends of man and trees and flowers are conscious of the footsteps of the Bridegroom as he passes by. This magic world is not unreal or fanciful but a world of imagination and eternity visible to all who do not refuse to see with the transfiguring eyes of love."

Part of this is certainly true but definitely not the whole of what Coomraswamy wrote is correct. Not all Mughal subjects were of aristocratic interest and many isolated examples do touch the deep springs of life by their intense spiritual force. But we should not forget that while writing these he was doing his missionary service to propagate Indian aesthetic ideal which he at that time believed as fully present only in Rajput art.

His interest in Mughal portraiture became apparent in the publication of his paper in 1912 entitled 'Mughal Portraiture', which was followed up by his paper 'Mughal Painting (Akbar and Jahangir)' in 1918, 'Portraits of Akbar, Raja Man Singh and Others', also in 1918, 'Portrait of Gosain Jadrup' in 1919, 'The Dying Man' in 1923, and 'Two Mughal paintings with portraits of Ali Mardan Khan' in 1924-5. In the sumptuous catalogue of the unique collection of Victor Goloubew, published as a special number of *Ars Asiatica* in 1929 and the Mughal volume of the *Boston Museum Catalogue* (1930), considerable emphasis was given on the excellent portrait studies of the Mughals. In the introduction of the last-named book he wrote :

> "The true character of the style is apparent chiefly in the portraiture and in the representation of historical events, typically darbar scenes ...".

Though there are numerous mask-like lifeless portrait studies by Mughal painters, Coomaraswamy succeeded in acquiring one of the finest portrait-studies ever coming out of the brush of a Mughal painter, the celebrated drawing of 'Inayat Khan on the threshold of death', which is perhaps the

most sensitive portrayal of a dying drug-addicted man ever painted. It was reproduced and discussed by Lawrence Binyon in his *Spirit of Man in Asian Art* (London, 1935) and Eric Schroeder in his excellent paper *The Troubled Image* included in the Coomaraswamy Festschrift *Art and Thought* (London, 1947). Richard Ettinghausen also included this in his paper contributed to *Great Drawings of All Times* edited by Ira Moskowitz (Vol. VI, New York, 1962) and S. C. Welch in his Mughal Painting (1963) and Indian Drawing (1976) exhibitions organised in the Asia House, New York.

His increasing interest in Rajput painting considerably decreased his earlier zeal for Mughal works. In the Introduction to the *Catalogue of the Boston Museum* he wrote :

> "Mughal Painting remains an entirely distinct creation, and cannot be described as dependent on contemporary Indian painting. This is apparent in technique, style, and character themes."

This is entirely different from what he wrote in 1910 in the Introduction of the *Indian Drawings* quoted earlier. His disenchantment with the Mughal Court style was most glaringly expressed in his surprise decision to exclude Mughal art altogether from his famous handbook *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (1927) with the insipid excuse : "Space did not permit a treatment of Musalman art in India ...".

But one must not conclude from this that he lost his interest in Mughal painting. In the same year his four-part study on Mughal Iconography 'Notes on Indian Paintings' was published in the *Artibus Asiae*, where new grounds were being broken by him in analysing Mughal miniatures and ascribing individual examples to a particular painter by studying the nuances of his personal style and expression. This was followed by Wilhelm Staude when he published his paper on Mishkin in 1928 and on Basawan in 1933, and by Ivan Stchoukine in his highly scholastic studies on Mughal portraiture (1929-30, 1931-2, 1935) and important illustrated manuscripts (British Museum *Diwan-i-Hafiz* in 1931, Rothschild *Bustan*

in 1937). A considerable volume of literature on Mughal painting has been published by Percy Brown (*Indian Painting under the Mughals*, Oxford, 1924), T. W. Arnold and Lawrence Binyon (*The Court Painters of the Grand Moguls*, Oxford, 1921), Heinrich Gluck (*Die Indischen Miniaturen aus Hoemsa Romenes*, Wien, 1925), E. Kuhnel and Hermann Goetz (*Indian Book Painting*, Berlin, 1924 and London, 1926), Ivan Stchoukine (*Les Peinture Indienne a Lepoque des Grands Moghols*, Paris, 1929), J. Strzygowski and others (*Asiatische Miniaturemaleric*, Klagenfurt, 1933) and J. V. S. Wilkinson (*The Lights of Canopus*, London, 1929). The study of Mughal painting has gathered a very rapid momentum, thanks to the pioneering efforts of Ananda Coomaraswamy.

Now the work of identification, dating and criticism in the field of Mughal painting is being pursued by a number of competent scholars in India and abroad. Exhibitions of Mughal miniatures, illustrated manuscripts and drawings have been organised in London, Paris, New Delhi and many important cities in the U.S.A., new collections have been started, new materials discovered and some brilliant papers and books have been published by scholars like J. V. S. Wilkinson, Basil Gray, Rai Krishnadas, Moti Chandra, Karl Khandalavala, Robert Skelton, Stuart Cary Welch, Ananda Krishna, Pramod Chandra, Richard Ettinghausen and Milo C. Beach, but the masterly fashion of the survey of the entire panorama of Mughal painting attempted in Coomaraswamy's *Catalogue of the Mughal Collection of the Boston Museum* has yet to be surpassed.

In fact with the exception of the Chester Beatty Collection, Dublin, none of the great collections of Mughal materials —the British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Freer Gallery, India Office Library, Windsor Palace Library, etc. has yet found a catalogue of Coomaraswamy's calibre.

Before concluding this brief survey we should take note of Coomaraswamy's sharp eye for fine specimens, which he

accumulated for the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, for whose cause he devoted his life, and the depth of his profound scholarship revealed in the entries of the series of *Catalogues*. The task of preparing the *Catalogue* was undertaken by him when he felt that he had succeeded in accumulating sufficient authentic and relevant information regarding their indentification, history and dating. Once these were obtained he started to make his in-depth study to determine their artistic quality, technical perfection and iconographic details. His goal was perfectly made clear in the Introduction of his *Rajput Painting* (Oxford, 1916, pp. 6-7) :

> "The justification of the historian of art is to be found in his ability to bring the reader into contact with his theme."

This deep and penetrating study of every single miniature enabled him to piece them together and to put them in their proper perspective. Thus the illustrations of the *Rasikapriya* were rightly included within the sphere of Mughal painting in spite of the *Nāgarī* script of the text. His dating and classification would hardly need any correction.

ANANDA COOMARASWAMY ON EARLY INDIAN ARCHITECTURE

K. V. RAMAN

ANANDA COOMARASWAMY'S understanding of Indian culture and art heritage was comprehensive and profound since he had a deep insight into the basic cultural moorings of India. His interpretations and appreciation of Indian religion, literature and art were the spontaneous outcome of his intimate familiarity with the Indian ethos as a whole. He saw the same fundamental ideas and messages as much in Indian art as in poetry, philosophy or religion. As he beautifully put it : "The tender humanism and the profound nature sympathies which are so conspicuous in the painting of Ajanta and sculpture of Mamallapuram are recognizable equally in the works of poets like Ashvaghosha and Ārya Shura and dramatists like Kālidāsa".[1]

Ananda Coomaraswamy's writings on Indian Architecture also reflect his characteristic yearning to know the conceptual framework and the multifarious manifestations of the Indian architecture through the ages. His little book *Early Indian Architecture* is indeed a masterpiece.[2] We find therein a brilliant discussion on the *prāsāda* or the palace on the evidence of literary sources and early Indian sculptural examples. He has examined the various parts and components of the palace such as the storeys, the streets leading to and inside the palace, the walls, gateways, different quarters and apartments, pillars, windows etc. Like a professional architect, he also examined the material employed in the construction of the multi-storeyed *prāsādas* and the development of *gavaksha*

[1] 'Hindu View of Art' in *The Dance of Shiva*, Calcutta and Bombay, 1948, p. 49.

[2] Now available in the form of a monograph (Delhi, 1975), this essay was first published in *Eastern Art*, II, 1930 and III, 1931. Arabic numerals in brackets indicate page numbers of this monograph. *Editor.*

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or the arched window which was a characteristic feature of early Indian architecture.

Let us see how he approached the subject. Firstly, we find an illuminating exposition of the technical terms relating to the *prāsāda* and its various components and correlation of the literary and sculptural evidences.

With regard to the definition of the important word *prāsāda*, he says : "Sanskrit *prasada*, Pali *pasada*, Prakrit *pāsāya* is constantly employed to designate a mansion, typically of several storeys. More often than not, the word denotes a palace or other pretentious dwelling ; but elsewhere also a monastery or temple" (1). He gives copious references from the *Mahabhashya*, *Matsya-Purana* etc. to demonstrate that the *prāsāda* in those days also signified a temple. For *prāsāda* denoting the palace he cites extensive references from the works like *Sahitya-darpana* and *Harsha-charita*. He gives various synonyms of *pasada* found in literature such as *Nivesa-pasāda*, *Raja-bhavana*, *Rāja-geha*, *Rāja-nivesana*, *Vasa-ghara*, *Vimāna*, *Antepura* etc. He observes : "The first and the last two of these terms always refer to single buildings, the others sometimes seem to imply the idea of the palace in a wider sense, as a group of buildings in a precinct enclosed by the outer wall (*pakara*) ; and *vimāna* usually means a palace of the gods" (1). His familiarity with the early Sanskrit and Buddhist literature enabled him to understand the subtle nuances of the terminologies and also recall the appropriate historical examples cited in the literature. For example, he says : "It will be recalled that Prince Siddhartha had three palaces for use at different times of the year, and the circumstances of the storey are such that all three must have been within the city walls" (1).

His discussion about the general layout of the palace and the various parts therein are also based on meticulous information gathered from various literary sources. Here is the description of the layout in brief : "A private or blind street led to the outer or main gate in the wall of the palace and was

called *antaravīthi* (inner street)... beside the *pāsāda-dvāra*... the *bahi-dvāra-koṭṭhaka* or outer gate-house lay at some distance from the actual palace where the king meets an honoured guest. ... We also find the term *rājadvāra* or King's gate. The hall of this gate was a place of congregation ... the Buddha is a guest in a *pāsāda* and in the evening resorts to the *bahi-dvāra-koṭṭhaka* where he sees the passers-by" (2). The other components of the palace like the royal courtyard, the stables, judgement hall, gardens, tanks, the royal chapels and so forth are also vividly located by him on the basis of literary evidences. Not only that, he goes into the other aspects of architecture like the basement and the constructive elements. On the basis of the ancient literature he succinctly describes the constructive elements thus : The pillar (*thambha*) to support the construction, the joist (*tulā*), jambs (*saṅghāta*), girths (*bhittipāda*), roof-ridges (*kūṭa*) and rafters (*gopānasi*), bondings of the walls (*pakkhapāsa*) and brackets (*mukhavaṭṭi*) "are bound to and supported by the pillar" (3). On the subject of pillar, he has much to say like the *sahasra-thamba* (one thousand pillars) and remarks that the Lokapāsāda at Anurādhapura might well have been called thousand-pillared, more than once burnt down, but is still extant. He refers to a rare and remarkable kind of *pāsādas*, called *ekatthūmka* and *ekathambhaka pāsāda*, i.e., supported by a single column in contrast to the usual palace supported by many columns. This he mentions from the Jain source. He classifies the *prāsādas* also on the basis of storeys : *ekabhūmika, ti-bhūmika* and so on up to *navabhūmika*. His remark on the arrangement of the storeys is worth quoting : "It should be understood that in most cases each successive storey was smaller than the one below it, like the upper parts of modern skyscrapers under the zoning laws in New York, and this explains how there could be on each floor numerous chambers (*kūṭagāra, sīhapañjara, harmya* etc.), each with a separate roof, cf. the appearance presented by some of the Rathas of Mamallapuram, by Akbar's tomb at Sikandra and by the Panch-Mahal at Fatḥpur-Sīkrī" (5).

How did the facades of *prāsādas* look like ? Coomaraswamy rightly compares them to the facades of the various Buddhist Chaityagṛihas at Kārle, Bhājā and Nāsik and cites inscriptional evidence from Orissa in which he finds the words *koṭhā* and *pasada* used to denote respectively the internal cells and the external facades. He also gives a detailed analysis of the various parts of a *prāsāda* like *upari-prāsāda* (upper floors), *heṭṭha-pāsāda* (lower palace), the *sopāna* (staircase), the balustrade and shows parallel in literature and sculptural representations. Even in a small architectural unit like the *sopāna*, he distinguishes many smaller parts like the uprights (*thambha*), cross-bar (*sūcī*), the coping (*uṇhīsa*) etc. We also find similar detailed descriptions of architectural members in his book *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*[1] (1927).

We also find an illuminating discussion on the term *kūṭagāra* as to whether it means an entire building with a beaked roof or a roofed pavilion or any storey of the *prāsāda*. He concludes with an elaborate proof that a *kūṭagāra* is a chamber with walls having a ridged barrel-vaulted or domed roof. He culls evidences from different works like the *Raghuvaṁśa*, the *Harsha-charita* and the *Vikramāṅkadeva-charita*.

Another type of a pavilion is the *sīhapañjara* meaning roofed dovecot and Coomaraswamy identifies it with the *pañjaram* of the Tamil tradition. Regarding the constructive materials also, he has made intensive research and correlated the sculptural evidence with literary data. He shows that the material chiefly employed in the many-storeyed *prāsādas* was timber for roofs, windows, stairs, floors and pillars ; brick for walls and rarely stone for the pillar or ground floor and basement. In literature he finds references to precious materials like *veḷuriya*, *phaḷika* and *manośila* and says that they are not fanciful, but convey some intelligible meaning. For example, the expression 'veneered with *veḷuriya* and

[1] For the relevant pages referring to them in this work, see Index, *s.v.* 'Architecture', p. 266. *Editor.*

phalika', he considers, as the probable indication of marble and crystal which could have been obtained in large-scale. He quotes an epigraphical support by citing an inscription at Dilwāṛā where the marble is spoken of as *sphaṭika*. *Veḷuriya*, according to him, may stand for any hard dark stone. Coomaraswamy presents a brilliant analysis of the evolution of the window (*gavāksha*) in the ancient Indian architecture. According to him, the arched window represents a characteristic and its most distinctive feature of our architecture. He rightly points out that the windows in addition to admitting light and ventilation served as porticoes either for looking out or showing oneself to the public. His view is ably supported by his illustrations from Bharhut and literary works like the *Raghuvaṁśa* and the *Buddhacharita*. He distinguishes different shapes of the arched windows and their development in the ancient, mediaeval and modern periods. He shows clearly how the different types of horse-shoe arch were known to the ancient Hindus as they employed them in places like Bhārhut, Māmallapuram, Ajanṭā etc. This development can be traced back at least to the Kushan period and it gradually develops a cusped form also. He rightly observes : "It is certain that from some or all of these sources a curved horse-shoe arch with many internal cusps must have been developed not long after the Gupta period and that elaborate forms are to be met as early as the eighth century in Java..." (11). According to him the cusped arch was known to Indian architects and should not be regarded as of the Western Islamic origin.

Thus the foregoing analysis and views of Ananda Coomaraswamy on the early Indian Architecture will serve as an example of his methodology-marshalling of the primary sources, literary, epigraphical and monumental, in expounding the history of ideas and institutions. Few could equal him in the thoroughness with which he collected the data from diverse sources and interpret them in a proper perspective. When he analyzed any part of Indian architecture he laid out a broad canvas which includes the Western Art as well as the

art of South-east Asia[1] to compare and contrast and to understand how India interacted with its neighbours. He did not believe in superficial comparisons and sweeping generalisations. For him, one has to study and understand the Indian evidence first and its antiquity assessed before one ventures on hasty conclusions. Otherwise it would lead to misrepresentations and distortions. His opinion regarding the antiquity of the arched window is an instance in point. He has shown its occurrence in India from very early times and dispelled the misconception that it was borrowed from the West.

Another important feature of Coomaraswamy's interpretations of Indian architecture is his profuse citations from Indian literature to arrive at correct explanations and elucidations of many obscure architectural terms. He combines his profound knowledge of literature with his scientific outlook on functional utility and constructional potentialities of new materials. He correctly distinguishes some architectural members as functional and some ornamental. His versatile ability and deep appreciation of Indian mind and culture have enabled him to present an authentic and unbiassed picture of the glories of Indian art heritage in its historical as well as technical perspectives.

[1] For his discussion on monuments of South-east Asia, see *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (Dover edition, 1965), pp. 156ff. *Editor.*

COOMARASWAMY AND INDIAN ICONOGRAPHY

KALYAN KUMAR DASGUPTA

I

THE study of iconography in India was at its infancy when Coomarswamy started it. He went a step farther and wrote on iconology or interpretative iconography.[1] Instead of confining himself to the descriptive aspect of an icon (Sanskrit *pratima, mūrti, bera*), Coomaraswamy endeavoured to find out its intrinsic meaning and the strains and strands that had gone into its making. This approach to the study of icons is best exemplified in his famous article, 'The Dance of Śiva', which first appeared in the *Siddhanta Dīpika* in 1912. Apart from Śiva-Naṭarāja, a few other Hindu deities and Gautama Buddha received his attention. His output on Jaina iconography is marginal in nature. He is also an *avant garde* in making incisive discussions on the role and significance of symbols in Indian art.

II

Of the Brahmanical divinities the most favourite to Coomaraswamy was Śiva, the master-dancer (*Naṭarāja*). A marvel of Indian art, the Nṛityamūrti of Śiva symbolizes the philosophy of universal flux. Better known as Naṭarājamūrtis, such icons hail from all parts of India, though South India has yielded the most outstanding type in bronze (earliest such specimens are datable to the early Chola regime, i.e.,

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[1] Coomaraswamy did not, however, use the term 'iconology'. Perhaps it was Bellori (1672) who first tried to connect the identified motifs with Classical or modern literary sources and he thus laid down the foundation of iconological studies.

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about the ninth-tenth century)[2]. In these bronzes Śiva is depicted as dancing with the left leg raised, the right resting on the back of the malformed dwarf, Apasmārapurusha (in Tamil *Muyalaka*) ; his front left hand is in the *dola-* or *gaja-hasta* pose (outstretched hand resembling the trunk of an elephant) pointed to the raised foot, the front right hand in the *abhaya-mudrā* ('no fear' hand-pose), the back right hand holding a *ḍamaru* (kettle-drum) and the back left a ball of fire ; the entire composition is placed on a pedestal where the ends of a flamboyant circular or elliptical aureole or *prabha* (in Tamil *tiruvasi*) meet. Coomaraswamy[3] explained the symbolism of this image-type of Naṭarāja with the help of the Tamil text *Unmai Viḷakkam* : "Creation arises from the drum ; protection proceeds from the hand of hope ; from fire proceeds destruction ; the foot held aloft gives release". He recognized in this image-type the expression of the five-fold activities (*pañchakṛitya*) of the god., viz., *sṛishṭi* (creation), *sthiti* (preservation), *saṁhāra* (destruction), *anugraha* (conferment of grace) in the shape of *mukti* or release of souls suggested by the hand pointing to the lifted foot and *tirobhāva* (obscuration, illusion, also giving rest) symbolized by the aureole. He deciphered the three-fold significance of the majestic dance of the great god : It is the image of his rhythmic play as the source of all movement within the cosmos which is represented by the arch; the purpose of his dance is to release the countless souls of men from the snare of illusion ; and the place of the dance, Chidambaram, the centre of the universe, is within the heart.[4] He[5] regarded the Naṭarāja icon as "a perfect visual

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[2] All the early Naṭarāja imags are of stone, *e.g.*, those from Bādāmī (late sixth or early seventh century) and Elloṛā (eighth century) and they are endowed with more than four hands. One of the earliest Naṭarāja sculptures has been recently found at Asanpat (Orissa) ; it belongs to the late fifth or the early sixth century.

[3] *The Dance of Shiva* (first published in 1920), Calcutta and Bombay, 1948, p. 87.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

[5] *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (hereinafter *HIIA*, first published, London, 1927), Dover edition, New York, 1965, p. 127.

image of Becoming adequate complement and contrast to the Buddha type of pure Being" and found in it an excellent "synthesis of science, religion and art".[6] Coomaraswamy transcreated the Naṭarāja image, as it were, and popularized it in the western world.

The iconological approach of the scholar is evident in another work, *Yakṣas* (1928, 31), again a classic in the field. He collected enormous literary and archaeological data to prove, *inter alia*, that the Yakshas were intimately associated with the elements of *bhakti* (loving adoration) and *pūja* (worship) in Indian religion. With the sculptural evidence he endeavoured to show how the iconography of the lower gods influenced the iconic types of the higher cult-deities. In his words[7] : "In early Indian art, so far as cult-images are concerned, one iconographic type stands out predominant, that is the standing figure with the right hand raised, the left hand on the hip ... Of this type are the early images of Yakṣas and Yakṣīs, whether independent or attendant. And it is also this type which provided the model for cult-images of other deities, such as Śiva or Buddha, when the necessities of Bhakti determined the appearance of all deities in visible forms". He further suggested that the images of deities which were fashioned by a certain class of people for their livelihood (as alluded to by Pāṇini in his aphorism *jīvikārthe chapaṇye*) were not the orthodox Vedic gods, but were popular objects of worship like the Yakshas and Nāgas, and also perhaps Vāsudeva, Arjuna and the guardian-deities called Mahārājas (viz., Kubera, Dhṛitarāshṭra, Viḍudhaka and Virūpāksha)[8].

Evidence of labour and erudition is also manifest in his brilliant paper entitled 'Early Indian Iconography', where he dwelt on the iconography of Śrī-Lakshmī, the goddess of Fortune and Abundance, and on that of Indra, the famous

[6] *The Dance of Shiva*, p. 93.
[7] *Yakṣas*, (Washington, pt. I, 1928, pt. II, 1931), reprint, New Delhi, pt. I, 1971, p. 29.
[8] *Ibid.*

Vedic god who in later times lost his former position and became the guardian-deity of the eastern quarters.[9] Śrī-Lakshmī, who has a conceptual proximity to the Greek Demeter and Latin Ceres, is an ideal of feminine beauty and as the Fortune-goddess receives veneration from the Hindus, Buddhists and Jainas alike.[10] The main conclusions of Coomaraswamy[11] about the iconography of Śrī-Lakshmī may be summed up in the following words. First, the most characteristic association of the goddess is with the waters and specifically with the lotus, which is a symbol of the waters (*Śatapatha Brahmaṇa*, VII.4.1.8). Second, in the representations of Śrī-Lakshmī she is associated with the lotus in three ways—as *padma-hastā*, holding a lotus in her right hand and placing the other hand on the hip ; as being supported by an expanded flower, serving as seat (*āsana*) or pedestal (*pīṭha*) ; and as *padmavāsinī* or *kamalālayā* when she is surrounded by flowering stems and growing leaves, very often holding one of the flowering stems in each hand ; all these three types are often combined in a single representation, *padmavāsinī* type being the most distinctive, occurring in the earliest examples (Basarh terracotta plaques of the second century B.C.). Third, Ardochso, the West Asiatic Fortune-goddess, bearing a cornucopia, figured on coins of the first century A.D., was gradually absorbed into Indian art and fused with the indigenous Śrī-Lakshmī ; the cornucopia becomes a lotus spray and the elephants are added and this transformation can best be followed in Kashmir. Fourth, Śrī-Lakshmī combines an abstract Vedic terminology with a concrete Indian Mother-goddess and a definite iconographic type, very early developed, has persisted almost up to the present day. Finally, the elements

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[9] *Eastern Art*, I, 1929, pp. 33ff, 125ff.

[10] See my 'Foreword' to Dr. Niranjan Ghosh, *Concept and Iconography of the Goddess of Abundance and Fortune in Three Indian Religions*, Burdwan University, West Bengal, 1979.

[11] *Eastern Art*, I, 1929, pp. 178ff.

of the Gaja-Lakshmī type are certainly not of Buddhist origin, nor is there any reason to suppose that a specifically Buddhist significance was ever attached to them ; the theory of Foucher that the female figure bathed by two elephants in early Buddhist art represents Māyādevī, the mother of Siddhārtha, may confidently be dismissed.

Coomaraswamy recognized in a relief of the great verandah at Bhaja (in Maharashtra) the oldest and in many ways the most interesting representation of Indra. According to him,[12] Indra was perhaps one of the first Vedic deities to be iconographically represented ; and the conception of Indra with the *vajra* (thunderbolt) is decidedly concrete. Regarding the figuration of Indra in Buddhist art Coomaraswamy[13] remarked : "Whether the representations of Indra in Buddhist art are to be regarded as based entirely on the non-Buddhist literary sources, or the corresponding popular beliefs, or whether they reflect the iconography of contemporary non-Buddhist cult-images of Indra, can hardly be decided at present ; all that we can be sure is that the Buddhist sculptors did not invent the type". About the origin of the cylindrical head-dress of Indra, which is first met with in the Bhaja relief, the scholar left the question open and remarked that it may be either indigenous, or of Central Asian, or Iranian origin, or may prove to have been common to India and Western Asia at an earlier date ; and further, it is evidently the prototype of the *kirīṭa-mukuṭa* of the mediaeval iconography.[14]

Coomaraswamy[15] regarded the elephant-headed god Gaṇeśa, originally a deity of the primitive and tribal peoples and now a major member of the orthodox Brahmanical pantheon, as representing a Yaksha type. He did so on account of the big belly and general character of the god.

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[12] *Ibid.*, p. 33.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 40.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 41.
[15] *Yakṣas*, pt. I, p. 7.

He[16] drew our attention to the earliest representation of an elephant-headed Yaksha on the Amaravati coping and said that though the elephant-headed deity does not find mention under the name *Gaṇeśa*, "he is effectively and perhaps actually equivalent to Kubera or Maṇibhadra".

III

'The Dance of Śiva' and 'The Origin of the Buddha Image' are landmarks in the study of iconography in this subcontinent. Indeed, they have opened the portals of iconological research in India and abroad. As to the question of the origin of the Buddha image, it is to be borne in mind that such images emerged simultaneously in Gandhāra and Mathurā and they are icono-plastically different.[17] Yet these differences between the Buddha figures of Gandhāra and Mathurā were missed or ignored by earlier scholars like Foucher and Grunwedel. Foucher asserted that the first Buddha image was turned out at Gandhāra by the Hellenistic artists.[18] His theory was based on the Apollo-like figures of the Blessed One and the general Hellenistic tenor of the cognate productions of the early phase of the Gandhāra school. Challenging this theory of the Western origin of the Buddha image Coomaraswamy maintained that in content and spirit the Buddha image is very much Indian. The characteristic features of a Buddha image, such as the posture, the nimbus and the *mudrās* of the Buddha-Bodhisattva figures (the Mathurā people hesitantly called the

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[16] *Ibid.*

[17] The stylistic differences between the Gandhāra and Mathurā types of Buddha images include, *inter alia*, the following: (i) the halo in the Gandhāra figures is plain, while it is scalloped at the edge in the Mathurā specimens; (ii) the Gandhāra Buddha is occasionally moustached, while the Master never appears with moustaches in the Mathurā art; (iii) the seat of the Great Teacher in Gandhāra is a lotus, whereas it is a lion-throne in Mathurā.

[18] *L' art greco-bouddhique du Gandhāra*; also his essay 'Greek origin of the Buddha type' in *Beginnings of Buddhist Art*, pp. 111ff.

statues of the Master as those of the Bodhisattvas), are traceable in early Indian art before the emergence of the Buddha image in the art of Gandhāra and Mathurā.[19] According to him,[20] the standing Buddha is derived from the standing Yaksha primitives of the type of Parkham, Patna and Deoriya of a date eariler then the portrait-statues of the Master of the repertories of Gandhāra and Mathurā, whereas the seated image of the Buddha has its prototype in *yogī*-like figures in some Bharhut reliefs as well as similar effigies found on a few specie of Maues and Kadphises I, and also on some early Ujjain coins. Though Coomaraswamy did not postulate any theory as to the priority of either school in the absence of any precise evidence, he was inclined to presume on general grounds a priority for Mathurā.[21] He held that the Buddha figure came into general use somewhat before the beginning of the reign of Kanishka, and not more than fifty years at most, if so much, before his accession.[22]

In his *Elements of Buddhist Iconography* (1935) Coomaraswamy analyzed the well-known symbols like the 'tree of life', 'earth-lotus', 'word-wheel', 'lotus-throne' and other cognate symbols of Buddhist art and observed that all of them represent a universal Indian symbolism and a set of theological concepts[23] (for a discussion of such symbols, *infra*, p. 63). He regarded the early Indian art as essentially the continuation of a mainly aniconic Vedic style and described the human figure of the Buddha as connatural with the Vedic Agni.[24]

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[19] *Art Bulletin*, IX, 1927, p. 323.

[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 302ff. The antiquity of the *yogī* figure is traceable to the proto-historic civilization as evidenced by the famous Paśupati seal from Mohenjo-daro.

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 323-24. Coomaraswamy places Kanishka's accession in A.D. 120.

[23] *Elements of Buddhist Iconography (henceforth EBI)*, Harvard, 1935.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

IV

Coomaraswamy's writings on Jaina iconography are of a peripheral nature. In fact, quantitatively they are small. He brought in the Jina or Tirthaṁkara figures in his discussion on the question of the origin of the Buddha image. He did so in view of the close resemblance of the figures of the Jina to those of the Buddha as well as of the parallelism of the Jaina and Buddhist development.[25] He bracketted these two image-types and put two intriguing questions to the advocates of the theory of the Hellenistic origin of the Buddha image[26] : if the Western origin theory is accepted, we have to assume that the Jina type of images were also derived form Buddhist ones, but then why the Jaina *āyāgapaṭas* (votive slabs bearing the figure of a seated Jina at the centre of the composition) from Mathurā, mostly datable earlier than any dated Buddha figures, are bereft of Hellenistic influence ; besides, how are we to account for the non-discovery of a single Graeco-Jaina sculpture from Taxila in the Scytho-Parthian period, where the Jains like the Buddhists were well established ? With regard to Jaina art, Coomaraswamy[27] remarked that the miniatures in Jaina paintings are not merely illustrations of the life of this or that one of the twenty-four Tirthaṁkaras, but in the last analysis are illustrations of a Universal 'Book of Genesis' (*bhāva-vṛitta, jāti-vidyā*) or cosmogony.

V

As elsewhere, so in India symbols have played a large part in her art. Again, it was Coomaraswamy who

[25] *Art Bulletin*, IX, 1927, p. 289.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 310.

[27] *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art* (henceforth *JISOA*), III, 1935, p. 127. Incidentally, he considered Jaina painting, unlike Rajput painting, but like Nepalese Buddhist art, as 'a formal art of hieratic tradition'. *Catalogue of the Indian Collections in the Museum of Fine Arts*, Boston, IV, 1924, p. 37.

first underlined the importance of this fact. He meticulously studied these symbols, be they on punch-marked coins, the earliest numismatic series, or in the narrative reliefs of Bharhut, Sanchi and Bodhgaya, or on the Gupta sealings from Basarh and Bhita. His well-known monograph, *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*, ably deals with the fundamental elements of Buddhist symbolism, such as 'tree of life', 'earth-lotus', 'word-wheel' and the 'lotus-throne'. Coomaraswamy tried to prove in this work that Buddhist art in India began in the second century B.C. with a well-developed set of symbols in its iconography ; and that these symbols can be traced back to the aniconic period of the later Vedic Saṁhitās and the Brāhmaṇas, if not to the *Ṛigveda*, the earliest of the Vedas. Moreover, a serious student of Christian metaphysics and theology, Coomaraswamy brought out many interesting similarities between passages in the works of mediaeval Christian theologians and mystics, like those of St. Thomas, Meister Eckhart, Ruysbroeck, and Bohme, and the passages in the Vedic literature ; indeed, such similarities are so striking that many utterances of these Christian writers might be taken as almost literal translations of Sanskrit sentences, or vice versa. Besides these so-called predominantly Buddhist symbols, Coomaraswamy listed a large number of symbols from coins and sealings as well as from the sculptural art. "The importance of these symbols, many of which have remained in use to the present day", remarked the scholar,[28] "lies in the fact that they represent a definite early Indian style, amounting to an explicit iconography." That he also realized the variable character of an identical symbol will be clear from his observation[29] : "The vocabulary of these symbols was equally available to all sects, Brāhmaṇas, Buddhists and Jains, each employing them in senses of their own." In

[28] *HIIA*, p. 45.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

other words, the same device was equally available to the various sectaries of bygone days (and perhaps even now) to illustrate their own faith. Indeed, Coomaraswamy transferred many of these age-old symbols and similar art-motifs from the category of ornamental to that of significant.

VI

Coomaraswamy also underlined the importance of some art objects which were unknown or little known before him. He drew our attention to the representation of Kalpavṛiksha of about the third-second century B.C. (now in the Indian Museum). He identified the conch-shell and the lotus flower, among the objects hanging from its branches, with two of the *nidhis* (gems) of Kubera, viz., *śaṅkha* and *padma* which find mention in our ancient literature. The famous fresco representing a nymph, standing in a lotus tank with a nude boy beside her stretching out his arms, met with at Dandan-uliq in Central Asia, may also be recalled here. He[30] suggested that this Central Asian nymph, with strong Indian affiliations, is typologically similar to Indian Lakshmī, as exemplified by the lotus-lady of the Kushāṇa pillar, now in the Lucknow Museum. Sometimes he brought new material to light. The combined mode of representing Śiva both in his human as well as phallic forms was known by the solitary example from Guḍimallam in the South. Coomaraswamy furnished an analogous instance of about the third century A.D., discovered at Mathurā, in which a four-armed figure of Śiva[31] is carved on one side of a long pillar-like emblem.

VII

The foregoing discussion has established, I believe, my prefatory statement : Coomaraswamy's study of Indian images is chiefly iconological in nature. And his basic notion about art and religion is perhaps best illustrated by

[30] *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

his iconological writings. This notion is that of the neo-Platonists which regards religion and art as names for one and the same experience—an intuition of reality and of identity and thus Coomaraswamy[32] was inclined to identify art with iconography. He[33] appears to have looked at the image of the Buddha more as a religious symbol than as an object of fine art and held that this image "came into being because a need had been felt for it and not because a need had been felt for art". The second major strain of his iconological writings is his attempt to trace many elements of Indian iconography to the Vedic thought and culture. In his words :[34] "The interpretation of the iconography and technical formulae of Indian art, be it Hindu, Jaina and Buddhist, cannot be profoundly understood apart from their roots in Vedic symbolism." He sought to justify his contention by early Buddhist iconography which is based on a variety of symbols. Finally, he maintained that in the fabric of Indian art the place of symbols is more important than is usually thought of. Once he[35] went to the extent of observing that Indian art is essentially symbolic.

VIII

Most modern readers of Coomaraswamy would not agree with the great scholar, who is a pioneer and trend-setter in our art-historiography, on one major count, viz., his notion about the relationship between art and religion. By equating art with religion and identifying art with iconography, Coomaraswamy reduced all art to religion and thereby completely ignored the secular aspect of art. Though religion had been a major source of inspiration to artists of the ancient and early mediaeval world, the unending joys and sorrows of the Eternal Man of the mundane world had no

[32] *Dance of Shiva*, p. 58.

[33] *Coomaraswamy : Selected Papers*, edited by Roger Lipsey, Princeton, U. S. A., 1977, I, p. 164.

[34] *JISOA*, III, p. 133.

[35] *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* (originally published under the title *Why Exhibit Works of Art*, London, 1943), Dover edition, New York, 1956, p. 53.

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mean part to play in the development of the art of bygone days. Ancient Indian art, or for that matter ancient art in general, is *largely*, but *not wholly*, religious. And iconography, is allied, but not identical, with art.

Barring this criticism Coomaraswamy's *oeuvres* are pioneering and magnificent. They have stood the test of time. Many of his pronouncements are not only valid even now, but have been also reinforced by new facts and supported by fresh arguments of his successors. His theory that the Buddha image is thoroughly Indian and originated in an Indian atelier, and that the Buddha figure came into general use somewhat before the reign of Kanishka, not more than fifty years before his accession, is a case in point. The combined testimony of early sculptures of the Buddha or Buddha-Bodhisattva, such as Friar Bala's Bodhisattva from Sarnath of the third regnal year of Kanishka (that is, A.D. 80-81, placing the accession of Kanishka in A.D. 78, and not in A.D. 120 as Coomaraswamy did), a Buddha statue from Kunduz in Afghanistan of the fifth regnal year of Kanishka (A.D. 82-83), a few Buddha figures recovered from the stratified site at Saikan Dheri near Charsada in Pakistan, the reliquary found at Bimaran in Afghanistan and the inscribed relic casket hailing from Shah-ji-ki Dheri at Peshawar in Pakistan as well as the coins of Kanishka bearing the human representation of the Master has soundly established the theory of Coomaraswamy. In other words, Coomaraswamy believed that (*a*) in spirit and content the Buddha image is very much Indian, that (*b*) the earliest Buddha images appeared simultaneously in the ateliers of Gandhāra and Mathurā and that (*c*) the first human representation of the Blessed One seems to have been fashioned sometime in the middle of the first century A.D[85a]

[85a] The Bimaran reliquary bearing the standing figure of Gautama Buddha, flanked by Indra and Brahmā (the Shah-ji-ki Dheri casket also bears these three figures), found in association of the coins of Azes II, is stylistically a product of the pre-Kanishka period ; it may be placed sometime in the middle of the first century A.D. There is no definite evidence to prove an earlier date for this reliquary.

The other conviction of Coomaraswamy was that many elements of Indian iconography have stemmed from the Vedic myths and traditions has also been buttressed by later researches. The writer of the present article has shown in one of his papers how a description of Vedic Rudra with a number of dogs surrounding him gave rise to Vaṭuka-Bhairava, an icono-conceptual form of Paurāṇika Śiva.[36] The great iconographer, J. N. Banerjea,[37] recognized the Gaja-Lakshmī device of the coins of Maues and Azes as a Hellenized version of the type of Lakshmī which Coomaraswamy described as 'Kamalālayā'. Banerjea[38] also endorsed his view that Gaṇeśa represents a Yaksha type. Criticizing the view of Foucher[39] that the lady-on-lotus bathed by two elephants appearing in the early narrative art of India represents the nativity scene of the Buddha, Coomaraswamy averred that this female figure is actually that of Srī-Lakshmī of the Indian tradition and Gaja-Lakshmī of the Brahmanical pantheon, and that Buddhism did not originate the formula.[40] And this theory of Coomaraswamy has since received universal acceptance. Coomaraswamy was, again, the first scholar to realize the variable character of symbols which one meets with on archaic relics like punch-marked coins. In support of his contention that the vocabulary of these symbols was used by different sectaries in senses of their own, I[41] may cite an illustration : A

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[36] *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, IX, 3-4, 1967, pp. 260-61.

[37] *Development of Hindu Iconography*, Calcutta, 1956, p. 110n. Incidentally, J. N. Banerjea acknowledged his indebtedness to the lead that Coomaraswamy gave to the study of iconography. *Presidential Address*, Indian History Congress, Allahabad, 1965.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 356.

[39] 'Images Indien nes de la Fortune' in *Mem. conc. l' Asie Oriental* I, 1913. See also his monograph *On the Iconography of the Buddha's Nativity*.

[40] *EBI*, pp. 22-23, 71, 91-92. See also *Eastern Art*, I, p. 175.

[41] This credit of Coomaraswamy was first pointed out by me in my article, 'Ananda Coomaraswamy and Indian Numismatics' in *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, XL, 1978, p. 8. For a paper on the same topic in the present volume, see A.N. Lahiri, 'Coomaraswamy and Indian Numismatics'.

chakra, which in one place may represent a *dharmachakra*, in another setting the Sudarśana emblem of Vishṇu which is a symbol of the Sun-god. Most scholars before Coomaraswamy failed to realize this variable character of an identical symbol. As for instance, Cunningham described the tree-in-railing symbol as the Bodhi tree and the wheel motif as the Buddhist *dharmachakra*, confining them exclusively to Buddhism.[42]

Collectively, Coomaraswamy's contributions to the studies in Indian iconography are not only pioneering, but also remarkably profound, evincing the insight of an ever-alert scholar. Long before Erwin Panofsky (1962) he endeavoured to bring out the 'intrinsic meaning' of an icon or image-type and sought to establish what Ernst Gombrich (1962) has pronounced : 'All art is conceptual.' Unerringly he once observed : "Iconography is the constant essence, and style the variable accident, of art." Indeed, Coomaraswamy went far beyond the dry iconographic research, reached the grass-roots of Indian tradition and philosophy, and thus made the study of a complex and specialized discipline like iconography not only interesting, but also significant and meaningful.

[42] As for instance, in *Coins of India*, London, 1891, pp. 70, 90.

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Top

Plaster relief portrait by John Frederic Mowbray-Clarke

Left

Coomaraswamy in 1915

Below

Coomaraswamy in 1909

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2

COOMARASWAMY ON PHILOSOPHY AND AESTHETICS

HIRANMAY BANERJEE

ANANDA KENTISH COOMARASWAMY will be remembered as the man who forged the key to the understanding of traditional art, particularly Indian art. It appears that both by birth and aptitude he was adequately equipped for this grand role. His heritage transmitted to him what is best in the culture of the East and the West. From his English mother he inherited his Englishman's scientific outlook and capacity for unsparing hard work. From his Ceylonese father tracing descent from Tamil ancestors, he inherited his love of Indian culture. To them he added his own contribution in form of an attitude characterised by sympathy and understanding.

These are the factors that shaped his career and won for him the achievements which enriched his life. Starting his career as a geologist, he drifted to art under the pull of his innate inclination. In course of his pilgrimage to the land of art, he built up a sizeable collection of specimens of Indian Art. By chain action, a strong urge was engendered in his mind to study traditional art. To fulfil this desire he needed patronage which could offer him financial security, a congenial atmosphere and leisure to devote himself exclusively to his work. Luckily for world culture, the Research Fellowship offered to him by the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston in 1932 fulfilled all the conditions. So, Boston functioned as the nursery where for long twenty-five years the fruits of his study and research were nursed and brought up for presentation to the world. Small wonder, he gratefully acknowledged his debt to the authorities of the Museum in his seventieth birthday address, particularly for the liberty allowed to him to extend his studies to wider fields to cover

'the whole of traditional theory of art' and 'the fields of comparative religion and metaphysics'.

To equip himself properly for the discharge of this self-imposed task, Coomaraswamy carried on the most intensive study in search of materials in the philosophical and religious literatures of the East and the West. He picked up a working knowledge of several languages to enable him to read in the original the Upanishads, Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Acquinas and Meister Eckhart, to name a few. In the process he amassed a vast wealth of knowledge in the field of traditional art and religious and philosophical literature of the world. Small wonder, his writings are distinguished by their encyclopaedic quality, integrated approach and the capacity to bring together analogous ideas from diverse sources.

The fruits of this stupendous labour are embodied in his numerous books and articles. Out of them emerge two major contributions : his theory of the nature of traditional art and a philosophy of his own. His theory of art provides the best possible introduction to the understanding of traditional art in general and Indian art in particular. It can competently function as the guide book to pilgrims to the holy land of traditional art. He discovered his philosophy in his effort to understand Indian art which is intricately mixed up with religion and philosophy. It is characterised by a distinctive outlook whose authorship can be rightfully claimed by Coomaraswamy himself despite his protestation that he did not set up any philosophy of his own. A brief account and an estimate of these contributions will be given in the following pages.

Coomaraswamy's Philosophy

In his seventieth birthday address, Coomaraswamy "said that he never built up a philosophy of his own, nor wished to establish a new school of thought". To our pleasant surprise, however, we find that he has presented us a philosophy with a distinctive flavour of its own. He had no liking

for philosophical systems built up by speculative thinkers giving an explanation of the universe, as he felt that the subjective element was so strong in them that they could never be expected to receive universal acceptance. He believed that philosophy is not a subject 'to be discovered', but it is interwoven with reality and is expected 'to be understood'. In that sense he felt philosophy should not be an 'enquiry' but 'an explicitation'[1] ; it is to be explained and understood. It was not for him, therefore, to build a new philosophy, but to explain what is there awaiting to be read.

To bring out the distinctive feature of this objective philosophy interwoven with reality, he adopts the concept of *philosophia perennis* to indicate that it is objectively based and, therefore, universal in application (*Universalis*). According to him, "metaphysics is not a system, but a consistent doctrine ; it is not merely concerned with conditioned and quantitative experience, but with universal possibility".[2] This is perennial "because of its eternity, universality and immutability".

The central doctrine of this perennial philosophy is, according to him, the doctrine of identity between the basic reality which is one and the reality which is presented to the senses which becomes a world of multiplicity. In fact, he adopts the doctrine of identity as formulated by Śaṅkara in his *Advaitavada* which identifies the world of multiplicity presented by the senses with basic reality which is intrinsically one. Śaṅkara explains the apparent contradiction involved in the theory with the help of a built-in theory of illusion, which he calls *Maya*, which distorts the unity of reality *per se* into the many of the senses. He, therefore, hails Śaṅkara as the expositor of the basic doctrine of *philosophia perennis*.[3]

[1] 'The Vedanta and Western Tradition' in *Coomaraswamy : Selected Papers* (henceforth *CSP*), edited by Roger Lipsey, Princeton, U.S.A., 1977, 2, p. 22.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4, 6.

So according to Coomaraswamy "the ultimate reality of metaphysics is a supreme identity in which the opposition of all contraries .... is resolved".[4] He calls reality *per se* which stands alone in solitary grandeur 'being' and the world presented to the senses 'becoming' and says that the unity of being is transformed into the multiplicity of becoming and they are identical.

He quotes parallel concepts to demonstrate the universality of the central idea of his perennial philosophy, which according to him is also *philosophia universalis*. In this connection, he refers to the dictum *Tattvamasi* of the *Chhandogya Upanishad* which holds that the individual self is identical with *Atman* or *Brahman*, which is the basic reality. According to him, this *Atman* or spiritual essence "is impartite whether transcendent or immanent".[5] He also identifies this *Atman* with the *Sanctus Spiritus* of Western theology, the Greek word *Pneuma*, the Arabic *Rūh*, the Egyptian *Amon* and the Chinese *Ch'i*.

Linked with the doctrine of identity and derived from it we get another concept of his, namely the idea of 'Universal Man' or the *Forma Humanistatis*. This is not identical with any particular man who is subject to birth and death and maintains a short temporal existence. According to him, the universal man is "independent of all orders of time and has neither beginning nor end".[6]

From these ideas follow two corollaries which help to give his perennial philosophy a complete shape. They are the propositions that there is no transmigration, and that knowledge is not learning a new fact but remembering.

Since Coomaraswamy holds that there is no individual who lives and dies, but it is the Universal Man that passes from life to life, there can be no transmigration of individual souls. The one and only transmigrant is the Universal Man

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[4] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

which transcends Time and is identical with basic reality. For support he refers to Śaṅkara's observation : "Verily, there is no other transmigrant but the Lord".[7] He also quotes in this connection the observation of the *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad* : "That great self who takes up his stand in womb after womb."[8] Secondly, he adopts the doctrine that knowledge is not based on experience or teaching, but it is a process of recollection. It is assumed that the Supreme Principle is omniscient and the Individual knows when he participates in the knowledge of this omniscient spiritual principle. For support he depends mainly on Plato and supplements it by quotation from some relevant passages ot the Upanishads. Plato introduced the doctrine that "there is no teaching but recollection".[9] He believed that the soul is immortal and since it has been born many times, it has learned all things without exception. Coomaraswamy refers in this connection to the concept of *Jātismara* accepted in Indian thought, which assumes that some individuals can recall the experience of their previous births. He also believes that the term *Vijñānātman* occurring in the *Praśna Upanishad* stands for the ultimate common memory on which the individual memory draws.[10]

We can get a fairly reliable idea of what the cosmology of the *philosophia perennis* adopted by Coomaraswamy would be like by referring to his exposition of what he calls Vedic Exemplarism, which obviously he adopts.[11] By exemplarism, he means the doctrine of relation, both cognitive and causal, between the one and the many, being and becoming. To demonstrate this theory, he adopts the symbol of the wheel used in the Vedic literature including the ancient Upanishads. He thinks that this symbol represents the universe in the cross-

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[7] *Satyam neśvaradanyaḥ saṁsārī.* Brahmasūtra Bhāshya, 1.1.5

[8] *Yo yonim yonimadhitisthatyeko.* *Śvetāśvatara*, 4.13

[9] Phaedrus, 278A.

[10] 'Recollection, Indian and Platonic', in *CSP*, 2, p. 57.

[11] 'Vedic Examplarism', in *CSP*, 2, pp. 177ff.

section. Here the hub stands for the supreme principle and each spoke represents an individual, while the two outer rims represent the two levels of consciousness of the individual, namely the *Adhyātma* and the *Adhidaivata*, the human and the angelic respectively.

The cosmology as adopted by him appears to suggest that in the doctrine of identity Coomaraswamy adopted, he was not perhaps in a mood to reject the multiplicity of the perceptual world as an illusion. In other words, he does not appear to have accepted the Advaita philosophy of the Vedānta wholly without reservation. In this context, he significantly says that "becoming is not a contradiction of being but the epiphany of being",[12] If the multiplicity of the world presented to the senses is the manifestation of the supreme being, it can hardly be rejected as illusion. Here he appears to come very close to the *Brahmavāda* of the ancient Upanishads.

Coomaraswamy's Theory of Traditional Art

Coomaraswamy believed that certain doctrines adopted in Aesthetics as it is understood today are an impediment to the correct appreciation of traditional art. They are the idea that an object of art is expected to rouse pleasurable sensations, as the derivative meaning of the term aesthetic suggests and secondly, that it is 'disinterested contemplation' that evokes the pleasurable feeling roused by an artifact. He rejects both the doctrines.[13] To equate the love of art, he observes, "with a love of fine sensations is to make works of art a kind of aphrodisiac." He rejects the other doctrine in equally strong terms. He observes that "disinterested aesthetic contemplation is a contradiction in terms" and even goes to the length of denouncing it as 'non-sense'.

He believes that there are two ways of appreciating

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[12] 'On the Indian and Traditional Psychology or Rather Pneumatology', *ibid.*, p. 336n.

[13] 'A Figure of Speech or a Figure of Thought', *CSP*, 1, pp. 13-14.

an artifact suited to two different levels of consciousness.[14] The sentimental Self which is restricted to sensations and feelings enjoys the aesthetic surface only. On the other hand, the intellectual or the spiritual Self 'enjoys their order and is nourished by what in them is akin to it'. The implication is that in traditional art it is the intellectual Self which appreciates.

Acccording to him, a correct theory of art for the appreciation of traditional art should recognise that art serves a specific purpose and, therefore, it is not disinterested and that it imitates not any objects of nature, but some idea bearing spiritual significance. An object of art, therefore, becomes an icon with which traditional art is mainly concerned.

To highlight these two aspects of traditional art, Coomaraswamy says that to be art properly so called, an object of art should enjoy the two properties of 'truth' and 'aptitude'. The words have been used in a technical sense. Truth means accuracy of the image with reference to the model. The model here is the mental image of which the art object is a symbol. He points out that the image created by the artist need not be a copy but 'an image akin and equal to its model'. In other words, it should be 'an ad-equate symbol of its referent'.[15]

The object of art is thus a copy of the model or the mental image. It is, therefore, representa1 in character. But he hastens to point out that it is not representa1 in the ordinary sense that it imitates objects of nature.[16]

By aptitude is meant utility. So the other essential property of art is that it can serve the spiritual purpose for which it is meant. Coomaraswamy believes that the icon is a support of contemplation through the traditionally prescribed iconographic features brought to life by the artist.

Fidelity of the image to the model and its utility as

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[16] 'The Philosophy of Mediaeval and Oriental Art', *ibid.*, p. 47.

a spiritual aid to contemplation are the two essential properties of art. They constitute what is meant by 'wholesomeness' of art. Coomaraswamy is inclined to hold that beauty and goodness are identical as they both originate in form,[17] though he admits that they differ logically. He elaborates by saying that form as perfection constitutes the goodness of a thing and form constituting material configuration which subsists in a harmony of proportions is beauty. Goodness pleases the appetite while beauty appeals to cognition and apprehension. The consumer in man is concerned with goodness and the artist in man is concerned with beauty. It is the same thing from two different perspectives.

According to this theory, therefore, there are two aspects of the aesthetic judgment, according to the point of view of the artist and that of the connoisseur. The artist is not concerned with the pleasurable reaction to the artifact, but its accuracy in representing the model that is with the aspect of truth. The connoisseur, on the other hand, is concerned with its utility to serve the purpose intended, that is spiritual contemplation.

This in brief is an account of Coomaraswamy's theory of traditional art. But to acquire a complete picture of his theory, some of its negative aspects call for a short reference. They distinguish it from other kinds of art. There are two major points which deserve attention : Traditional art is not expressionistic and it is not realistic.

According to Coomaraswamy, there is no scope for self-expression here, as the task of the artist is limited to giving shape to an artifact to represent the model to the best possible extent. In fact, Coomaraswamy has no respect for the doctrine of expressionism in art either, according to which art is the medium of expressing one's inner or subjective emotions or sensations. He thinks that it is akin to what may be called exhibitionism.[18]

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[17] 'The Mediaeval Theory of Beauty', *ibid.*, p. 222.

[18] 'Imitation, Expression and Participation', *ibid.*, p. 279.

Traditional art cannot be realistic, as it is not expected to depict objects exactly as they are in nature. The reason is that they do not copy nature but a model which is mentally drawn up to suggest some spiritual aspect of divinity. It is, therefore, permitted to depict men with many heads and arms or with more than two eyes or with heads of other animals as in the images of Hindu gods. Such practice obtains in Western art also. The Apocalyptic Lamb, for example, is shown as seven-eyed to represent a particular aspect of God's nature. Coomaraswamy observes that where such deviation is called for in the interest of 'the meanings to be expressed, to represent a figure designed as though to function biologically would be to sin against art and nature both'.[19]

[19] 'The Philosophy of Mediaeval and Oriental Art', *ibid.*, p. 47.

COOMARASWAMY'S APPROACH TO INDIAN AESTHETICS : ITS RELEVANCE TODAY

JAYANTA CHAKRABARTI

ANANDA COOMARASWAMY, Havell and Kramrisch stand foremost among those who have brought the glory of Indian art to the wide notice of the world and given it an international recognition. Coomaraswamy's art criticism was based on scientific analysis and enriched by understanding, sympathy and deep insight. "His intellectual integrity, vigour of thought, and dispassionate advocacy of a culture, ... with special reference to metaphysics and ethics—have been instrumental in carrying conviction among impartial thinkers".[1]

Coomaraswamy was thoroughly bred in European tradition and culture, yet he had a deep interest for the cultures of India and the Orient. His father, a leading Tamilian figure in Ceylon, although died when Ananda was a child of about two years old, "exercised an enormous influence on his son, not only by his example but through the milieus to which his talents and energies had integrated him, both in Ceylon and in England".[2] That is why Coomaraswamy's mind was nourished by two distinct and divergent cultures—the cultures of India and of the West. This type of double vision, in most cases, becomes too heavy a burden, resulting morbid melancholy out of mental conflict and cultural mal-adjustment. "But in the case of Ananda Coomaraswamy the tension—which certainly existed in this sensitive soul—was of a productive kind ; it was a challenge under which his own personality

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[1] B. S. Sitholey, 'Ananda Coomaraswamy and Havell', *Ananda Coomaraswamy : Remembering and Remembering Again and Again*, Ed., S. Durai Raja Singam, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, 1974, p. 257.

[2] Roger Lipsey, *Coomaraswamy—His Life and Work*, Princeton University Press, U. S. A., 1977, p. 7.

developed into depths and heights".[3] He could, therefore, help the Westerners to better understand their own culture by interpreting the East to them, and by interpreting the West to his Indian compatriots, he could help them to understand properly the value and wealth of the Oriental culture.

When Coomaraswamy turned his eyes to the vast wealth of art of his country, his own native subcontinent, his vision was clear and uncumbered by bigotry or prejudice and he at once unravelled the central truth of Oriental art. The more this truth was revealed to him the more he was charmed by the unique beauty of this truth and convinced by the superiority of the in-centric quality of Indian art over the realistic, non-centric quality of the art of Europe.

In his eagerness to establish the validity of his subjective feeling, Coomaraswamy went to explore the sources of Indian art and its basic inspiration and idealism. He examined on one hand the Indian art objects of different periods and read on the other the early Sanskrit *śilpa* texts, with a view to finding clues to the basic attitude of the Indian artist to his art.

Coomaraswamy noticed in Indian aesthetics an excellent solution or resolution of the time-old notion of conflict between art and craft that figures so prominently in the European thinking. It is to be noticed that the author of the *Mānasollāsa*,[4] Someśvara, while defining the qualities or virtues of a painter has used expressions like *vidhinirmāṇa-kuśalaiḥ, varṇapuraṇadakshaiḥ, kṛitaśramaiḥ*, etc. which clearly indicate that craftsmanship is an essential adjunct to the creativity of an artist and helps the painter's individual art expression. The *Śilparatna* and other *śilpa* texts likewise corroborate this view. In the ancient *śilpa* texts, thus, no dichotomy has been allowed to exist between art and craft. In 'The Theory of Art in Asia' Coomaraswamy observes that the sixty-four arts mentioned in Indian literature "embrace

[3] 'In Memoriam', *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art*, XV, 1947, p. 4.

[4] *Mānasollāsa*, II, 1, verses 130-131.

every kind of skilled activity, from music, painting, ... and the practice of magic, without distinction of mark".[5]

In fact, Indian art is not severed and separated from the over-all philosophy of life that prevailed in India. This philosophic attitude to art of the Indians was upheld by Coomaraswamy as he believed that in India "Art was a way of life".[6] In support of his statement Coomaraswamy quoted from the *Agnipurāṇa* (ch. XLIII) the portions which deal with art and dream. In it the direction given to the sculptor is that in the night previous to the day when the artist is going to start his work he should purify himself and pray—'O thou Lord of all the gods, teach me in the dreams how to carry out all the work I have in my mind'.[7] By referring to this prayer of an artist Coomaraswamy noted that to an artist his art is an extension of his life,—both conscious and sub-conscious—including all the hopes and aspirations, thoughts and anxieties that come floating in a dream. In Indian concept, art is thus interlinked with man and his society, its function being to complete, vivify and beautify life.

Coomaraswamy also realized that the Indian ideal of realizing the art-form through meditation is not something detached from life. It is an act of concentration and not renunciation of the reality. In Indian art there is no experiment on such abstract form as completely cut off from nature or surrounding life "since one cannot imagine 'form' in the abstract, but only this or that form. In Indian terms, an image can only spring from a 'seed' ".[8] Moreover, one of the eight essential merits of art, as mentioned in the *Vishṇudharmottara*,[9] is *sadṛiśya* or similitude, i.e., correspondence in

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[5] A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'The Theory of Art in Asia', *Transformation of Nature in Art*, Dover Pub., 1955, p. 85.

[6] A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'Is Art a Superstition ?', *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, Dover Pub., 1956, p. 85.

[7] A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'Hindu View of Art : Historical', *The Dance of Śiva*, reprint, New Delhi, 1968, p. 27.

[8] A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'Is Art a Superstition ?', *op. cit.*, p. 82.

[9] Ch. 43, Verse 19.

both form and spirit, body and soul. The stress on spirit in Indian art, thus, is not in complete rejection or minimization of the importance of the appearances. The stress is on the working in close cooperation, collaboration and association with nature ; of course, it never encourages mere appearances based on superficial or surface qualities at the cost of the inner spirit or soul. The actual "principle involved is that true knowledge of an object is not obtained by merely empirical observation or reflex registration (*pratyaksha*), but only when the knower and known, seer and seen, meet in an act of transcending distinction".[10] To an artist, the highest goal of his art is the artist's own self-realization, and this is integrally connected with his experience of life and society. The exterior and the interior are happily coalesced in Indian art, and the individual and the over-all nature of his concept has saved Indian art from an object of coterie, completely divorced from humanity at large, and from an object of appreciation by a limited few only.

This magnificent conception and ideal of Indian art remained obscure in the pages of *śilpa* texts, and but for the competent re-interpretation by Coomaraswamy, Stella Kramrisch and others it could hardly have come into prominence as it has in recent years.

It is the excellence of Coomaraswamy that his views are wonderfully independent in their conviction and clarity. It will be idle to say that Coomaraswamy brought to bear Indian art upon Western critical method or upon Western art an Indian viewpoint based on the *śilpa* texts. He is not just a go-between to interpret the East to the West or vice versa ; he is a philosopher aesthete standing on his own merit, deriving sustenance from both Eastern and Western art and art criticisms. Coomaraswamy's brilliance rests on this fair independence even while he specially upholds the spiritual quality of Oriental art. Where, however, he is practically of

[10] Coomaraswamy, 'The Theory of Art in Asia', *op. cit.*, p. 6.

no help to us is in the matter of exposition of techniques mentioned in the *Śilpa* texts. Had he been able to scrutinize this aspect also he would surely have enriched our knowledge further and established his points more convincingly. While writing his exposition of the *Śilpa* texts, he has not been able to rescue from obscurity the details of the working processes and techniques that are actually mentioned in those *Śilpa* texts and were surely practised in earlier times. In writing these technical things he has just theorized and anticipated them, more or less philosophically and instinctively, rather than factually. He failed in this respect to bridge the gulf between the ancient tradition and that of the modern. Another point of criticism about him is his negative attitude towards modern art. He has damned modern art quite unfairly, being indifferent and apathetic to its positive quality of experiment, psychoanalytic nature and philosophy reflecting the changing socio-political conditions. "But this negative view is redeemed many times over by his brilliant and positive account of traditional art".[11] He has made use of Oriental sources chiefly to remind that "true philosophy is always and everywhere the same". In fact, in his elucidation of the dialectic process of Indian art, Coomaraswamy brought to light some "wider and deeper messages of aesthetics which are of a profound spiritual nature since they are steps to a realization of the unity latent in variety. One of these is the close correspondence between the three great disciplines of civilization, Art, Science and Religion".[12]

Art criticism today involves more branches of study than it used to do in the past. History, Sociology, Philosophy, even Science and Technology—nothing is outside the domain of art criticism any longer. It may be that neither Coomaraswamy nor others could singly cover all these aspects;

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[11] Roger Lipsey, ed. *Coomaraswamy*, I, pp. XXXV-XXXVI.

[12] Jacques De Marquette, 'An Appreciation', *Ananda Coomaraswamy: Remembering and Remembering Again and Again*, p. 15.

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in fact, it was not possible for any individual to embrace so many disciplines in one life. We have now more extensive team works and aid from more disciplines than one, but the first initiative, we can safely say, came from the scientist-cum-philosopher art critic that Coomaraswamy was. In the context of Indian art criticism, it is Coomaraswamy who set the pioneer example of how to combine scientific discipline with philosophy and liberal imagination and brought them fruitfully to gather the knowledge of several domains, and produced a wonder of art criticism which is likely to stand the test of time and remain a path-finder for the future art critics and connoisseurs.

DIALECTICS OF ART AND ANANDA COOMARASWAMY

KANCHAN CHAKRABORTI

THE stature and standing of Ananda Coomaraswamy cannot be measured in absolute terms with epithets and apotheoses. Yet an access to even an integrated personality prompts an inescapable segmentation.

Whether in the realms of knowledge or in the contours of feelings and sensibility Coomaraswamy's outlook and approach have invariably been integral and synthetic. In cultural contexts he did not believe in geographical and political boundaries. The ethno-anthropological basis and bias of humanity have formed the core of his arguments. To him human heritage was only a multi-racial cross-fertilization and not a story of cultural domination of one over the other. Cultural tendencies and for that matter art expressions were but the consolidation and crystallization of reactions according to the circumstantial variations.

This particular promise dictated Coomaraswamy to combat the traditional arguments regarding the Indian and the pan-Asian heritage vis-a-vis the Mediterranean dominance over it. Speaking strictly in terms of visual art, he drew the attention of the art-world to the prevailing controversies around tradition and modernity. Both the terms have been dealt either too formally or emotionally, much less integrally and objectively. Tradition, in popular concept, represents outdated, outmoded squabbles with scarcely any specific validity or relevance in the society in a flux ; whereas modernity, however outrageous it might prove to be, is the logical expression and image of contemporaneity. Coomaraswamy analyzed that they were an inseparable whole. Modernity cannot stand in isolation from or independent of tradition. Tradition is

like life, a process in continuation, asummation or the interactions at every stage of human activity and endeavour. Modernity is but a phenomenon in evolution. There is hardly any room for monopoly, fashion or arbitration in modernism. Its motivation depends entirely on the universal socio-cultural reactions.

We are mobbed, at the moment, by scores of pseudo-concepts like progressivism, non-conformism, individualism, internationalism, free expression and so on and so forth. It is curious that we look disdainfully at any such word as nationalism and tradition ; the entire perspective is vitiated. Why, modernity, if it is viewed as at all a separate phenomenon, has unquestionably also built up its own tradition. Let us concretize a little. In the name of progressivism, internationalism and contemporaneity in expressive art, we are freely borrowing and importing means and ideas from the West, the citadel of the present-day modernism. It has given us an edge to become 'intellectual parasites'. But how much have we really been able to incorporate—the superficial elements alone, resulting in a hybrid visual panorama : it is not integrated and synthesized. It is rarely an embodiment of a realized vision. It bears little relevance to the society at large either. Art is drifting away from the social currents and contexts. In an international exhibition of modern art to-day, it is difficult to discover the national identity of those countries which happened to pass through a pale of colonial rule. Cecil Burns, Principal of Sir J. J. School of Art, Bombay, once observed : "India from the artistic point of view became and since remained a suburb of Paris or London".[1] More than half a century has since been elapsed. Can we genuinely claim that the situation has altogether changed by now ?

But a modern painting from, say, Japan, is never lost in the melee. She has also gone mod but she has not underestimated tradition as such. The more we dabble in surface-imitation

[1] Cecil Burns, *Journal of the Society of Arts*, London, June, 1909.

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the more prophetic sound the observations of Coomaraswamy. He had reasons to be grieved particularly because "the East ... at the very moment when its real greatness is becoming apparent to the West, is losing its hold upon its own treasure".*

Coomaraswamy is, again, extremely emphatic in maintaining that the artists and craftsmen are only inseparable whole, essentially complimentary to each other. In the western outlook they are different entities altogether, they represent dissimilar classes and categories in the society and the result we see : art is no longer a social phenomenon. Can art really be created without the craftsmanship ? It is a contradiction, a blasphemy.

Let us examine our sophisticated methods in overcoming such limitations. We may, for instance, take up the case of the Handicrafts Board of the Government of India and its performances and achievements. The elaborate official planning, patronization, welfare programmes including the felicitations of the 'Master Craftsmen' by the President of India and the annual awards could change the reality in the least. Perhaps we have earned a few crores in foreign exchange and helped the few awardees to be more and more status-conscious in their community but the economic and socio-psychological tableau did not have any occasion to change. The promise is wrong in itself, the emphasis is wrongly spelt. Art and craft—artists and craftsmen—have to be bosomed together in a cohesive and integral relationship. Coomaraswamy was not a visionary of the ivory-tower. His prescription for the malady was straight-forward : nations have to champion the cause of Industrial art, because, both art and industry validly represent the organic social growth of not only the West but also of the future industrial Asia. "Industry without art is a brutality" is the realization of an aesthete. But "the principal lack in modern Indian art is due

* Coomaraswamy, *Art and Swadeshi*, Ganesh & Co., Madras, p. 133.

to the non-existence of an educated public wanting or understanding art at all"[3], is the observation of an analytical sociologist.

The analyst went further to reveal that art was now identified and correlated with the talent and temperament of the individual artists. In the role of assessors came the well-to-do families, so-called connoisseurs, the gallery people and the museum men. The merit of the art work was determined now by the verdicts of these agencies. What more curious could happen : the people, the masses, the onlooker should have to communicate with the art work through the eyes of a seemingly devoted, dedicated and competent celebrities like the connoisseurs, art critics and obviously those who could 'pay the piper'. Coomaraswamy painfully stated "look round about you at the vulgarisation of modern India—our prostitution of art to the tourist trade".[4]

The ways of the contemporary artists again provoked him to criticize them scathingly. He said : look at the fun, even the most talented artists of the day veer around the art critics and the gallery men to earn a little recognition and reward with commensurate material benefits. An artist grins most happily if his art work finds a place in the galleries or museums. Coomaraswamy's criticism however was equally measured with the ethos of a humane sociologist : "... artist in the modern city—doing nothing great mainly because nothing heroic is demanded of him".[5]

We do not know when we can pronounce a halt to this trend and fashion. But perhaps we can glance a little bit off the track. What is happening now in the West where the tradition of connoisseurship and art criticism have been reared most fondly and to what extent Coomaraswamy's observations have relevance therein.

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[3] *Ibid.*, p. 135.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[5] Durai Raja Singam (ed.), *Homage to Coomaraswamy*, Vol. II, Malaysia, p. 261.

In the West there is already a movement against the Order of so-called art critics and connoisseurs. Tom Wolfe and a few other celebrated names are now spearheading the attack. In a pungent publication with the title 'The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test' Wolfe has revealingly retorted that art is now only an 'intellectual commerce' and the galleries have become 'the temple of modernity' and commercial fantasy of art scene makes 'you see what they say'. At the moment the western camp is evenly distributed in favour or against Tom Wolfe who has been acclaimed by a camp as the 'Ruskin of our time' and ruthlessly epitheted as 'vindictive reactionary' by the other. In Rudolf Arnheim, one of the serious exponents on art, we may discover too an identity with Wolfe when he observes in paying a tribute to Coomaraswamy that "pussyfooting disquisitions of our aestheticians and critics seemed to fade away when he spoke harshly of the playboy culture that had rendered art to a confection".[6]

Connoisseurs and critics cannot be produced by courses, expositions and explanations alone, if there is no identity of art with society. Aesthetic reaction, pictorial sensibility, formal tension, visual harmony and a galaxy of such other terms, howsoever concrete they sound to be, they serve absolutely no purpose in an equation of art and common man. In the same vein Coomaraswamy cautioned against the tendencies to assess the qualitative and aesthetic import of an art work on the basis of psycho-analytic approach to human likes and dislikes, pleasurables and non-pleasurables. Is it indeed possible to draw a line of demarcation between the non-formal and aesthetic elements of art ?

It has to be measured carefully, again, as to how much service is being rendered by such self-styled orientation as 'art appreciation'. Coomaraswamy analyzes that the aestheticians and the professors of art rejoice in the unintelligibility of art

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[6] Rudolf Arnheim, 'The Man with the Tables of the Law', *Ananda Coomaraswamy : Remembering and Remembering Again and Again*, ed., Durai Raja Singam, Malaysia, 1974, p. 98.

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(and) at the same time they explain it psychologically, substituting the study of man himself for the study of man's art.[7] He dismissed the trend and tradition as 'altogether futile'. His focal point, however, has been the ethno-anthropological factors and contexts. "He was therefore, ever mindful of what the native artist had to say about the use and meaning of his product and this is (indeed) the attitude of the anthropological field worker".[8]

In a further elucidation Coomaraswamy observed that the extreme egoism and individualism of the artists had kept them and their public wide apart. Artist is essentially a social being, he has his social obligations and imperatives. The Oriental world with its eloquent heritage of psycho-social affiliations can no longer afford to divorce art from society.

Keeping every other aspect aside, the artists' profession would simply be drawn closer to Coomaraswamy by the sheer selection of paintings and sculptures for the reproduction in his books. A little attention will reveal that a considerable number of plates in his volumes are discriminatively different from those included by the parallel authors. This differentiation obviously was not merely for differentiation's sake but for the sake of absolute representativeness alone. Coomaraswamy has often been regarded as patently a traditionalist. This sort of criticism apparently originates from pronouncements like "the future of Indian art depends on the future of nationalism among us".[9] The misconception is dispelled, however, if we care to recall that Coomaraswamy was perhaps the lone Asian who hailed for the first time

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[7] Coomaraswamy, 'What Is The Use Of Art Anyway', *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, Dover publication, 1956, p. 89.

[8] L. C. Wyman, 'The Anthropological Approach to Art', *Ananda Coomaraswamy : Remembering and Remembering Again and Again*, p. 151.

[9] Coomaraswamy, *Art and Swadeshi*, p. 52.

Rabindranath's painting as truly creative and contemporary[9a]. That he was a champion of the contemporary trends in creative Bengal is also not unknown to us. He had, however, some misgivings about the dependence of the Abanindra School on literary sources. His dissatisfaction has been corroborated by, we know, the formation of the Calcutta Group in the early forties, as a valid reaction to Bengal School[9b].

With so much of isolation from the society, growing preference for creating art within the walls, riot with colours and squabbles with form, jugglery in textural experimentation with least affiliation to sensitivity and intuitive realization, we pride to create an art apotheosized as 'fine art', in Coomaraswamy's epithet, 'useless art'. Perhaps, we are left with no other alternative but to react eloquently to his verdict that art cannot be created with a love for art, but only with an adoration of life—nothing more and nothing less. His clarion call resounds : "Let us not love art because it will bring us prosperity, rather because it is a high function of our being".[10]

[9a] Significantly, Coomaraswamy said in this context : "They are not pictures about things, but pictures about himself. In this sense they are probably much nearer to his music than to his poetry ... The painting is an intimacy comparable to the publication of private correspondence. What a varied and colourful person is revealed !" *Editor.*

[9b] For the Calcutta group and some of its painters, see my articles in the Bengali art-journal (defunct), *Sundaram* edited by Subho Tagore (himself a painter of that group), 1363 B.S. (1956), 1364 B.S. (1957) and 1365 B.S. (1958). *Editor.*

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

COOMARASWAMY'S CONCEPT OF ALAṀKĀRA

R. K. Das Gupta

"The Indian theory (of art) ... does not in fact differ from what is implicit in the Far Eastern view of art, or on the other hand in any essentials from the scholastic Christian point of view, or what is asserted in the aphorisms of Blake" —Coomaraswamy.

Coomaraswamy's views on Sanskrit poetics are known to our scholars of Indian art and art criticism : they are not usually valued by our students of literature who often dismiss it as something too esoteric to deserve serious attention. A close study of his essays bearing on Sanskrit poetics would however show that he has said a good deal about it which is original and which gives a new dimension to ancient Indian literary theory. His concept of *alaṁkara*, in particular, is significant as a new approach to Sanskrit poetics, an approach which gives it a literary prestige which has been denied to it by some of its ablest historians.

In some of his essays Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya, the first important name in the history of Bengali literary criticism, curtly dismisses the *alaṁkarikas*, the exponents of Sanskrit poetics, as respectable but useless theorists. The attitude was a little strange in a man who built up his philosophy of life on a new interpretation of our old sacred texts. Bankim needed a Śāṇḍilya to explain his doctrine of *bhakti* : he did not need an Abhinavagupta to explain his ideas on poetry. Till the early decades of this century *alaṁkaraśāstra* was mostly the concern of our traditional pundits who would pursue it as a discipline along with other disciplines like grammar and logic. When our new criticism emerged in the seventies of the last century it did not look for its theoretical

foundations in our old Sanskrit texts on the art of poetry. The new poets too would repeat the words of Michael Madhusudan Datta : "I will not write poetry under the dicta of Mr. Viśvanātha." It is now important to realize that Michael's oft-quoted remark on the author of *Sāhitya-Darpaṇa* indicates the nineteenth-century view of *alaṁkāra* texts as technical manuals for poets, a kind of cookery books for the young writers who need instructions about how to proceed about their business. They were not treated as profoundly philosophical texts on the theory of poetry and theory of beauty.

But what view did the English-educated Sanskritists of the early decades of this century take of *alaṁkara* ? The Western Sanskritists edited and annotated several major texts of our *alaṁkāra* literature. The Indian literary scholar who had any interest in classical Sanskrit literature discovered that there was a good deal to read in Sanskrit poetics. In his *History of Indian Literature* (1852) Weber spoke of Sanskrit poetics as an example of the Hindu mind's flair for 'nice distinctions and of its capacity to present propositions in an extremely subtle and ingenious fashion'. But the German scholar does not say a word on the significance of our *alaṁkāraśāstra* as either a philosophy of poetry or as an aid to criticism. About half a century later A. A. Macdonald does not give more than a brief bibliographical paragraph to Sanskrit poetics in his *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (1899). In his *A History of Classical Sanskrit Literature* (1920) A. B. Keith gives an excellent survey of Sanskrit poetics in about 30 pages, but he says nothing by way of showing its relevance to our understanding of any poetry, nor does he compare its theories with the influential literary theories of Europe. Only three years later appeared the third volume of Winternitz's *History of Indian Literature* and here again there is not much about the place of *alaṁkāra* literature in the history of poetics *per se*. The work which gave a new dimension to studies in our *alaṁkara* literature is S. K. De's *Sanskrit Poetics* published in two volumes in 1923. It is an

analytical survey of the vast corpus of our *alaṁkāra* literature presented with remarkable precision and clarity. But it gave a view of *alaṁkāra* which created the impression that the discipline was in origin and essence, a body of prescriptive formulation for the use of poets : "If any deduction is permissible from the name 'Alaṁkāra' (lit. embellishment) given to the disciplines as well as from the contexts of the earliest existing works on the subject, it will appear that the science started *a posteriori* out of the very practical object of analysing poetic embellishments of speech with a view to prescribe definite rules of composition." S. K. De's concept of *alaṁkāra* then negates the monistic view of the poetic process in which language is integral with thought. There was a firm basis for an idea of this oneness of thought and expression in Vedantic Advaita. On the other hand, when S. K. De's work on Sanskrit poetics appeared Croce's dictum that all poetry is born expressed was about two decades old.

S. K. De stuck to this view of *alaṁkāra* till the end of his life. And he possessed enough learning in Sanskrit grammar and logic to be able to defend his position. His Tagore Lectures on *alaṁkāra* delivered in the University of Chicago were published as *Sanskrit Poetics as a Study of Aesthetic* with notes by Edwin Gerow in 1963. In them S. K. De calls his subject "the elaboration of a series of more or less mechanical formulas and rigid categories" and adds that "the *ars poetica* in India, which went by the name of the science of embellishment (*alaṁkaraśāstra*), did not go further than being a series of artificial advices to the poet in his profession". At the end of his last lecture S. K. De says : "Sanskrit poetics delighted in the pleasure of abstract thought and formal calculation. Its method is suitable for the study of Botany or Zoology, but affords hardly any assistance for the understanding of aesthetic facts or principles." So the great scholar who taught us Sanskrit poetics also taught us to believe that it had little value as an aesthetic system.

When in 1926, that is only three years after the publica-

tion of S. K. De's *Sanskrit Poetics*, Atul Chandra Gupta discovered, at least for the Bengali reader, the relevance of some of the major theories of the *alaṁkārikas* to literary criticism in a series of articles published in *Pravasī* and when the articles were published as a small book called *Kavyajijñasa* the following year there was very little of serious controversy in print regarding his disagreement with S. K. De's view of Sanskrit poetics. Atul Gupta does not mention S. K. De in his book ; he only refers to him in his preface as a reliable source of material about the Sanskrit texts. About twenty years after *Kāvyajijñāsā* appeared S. N. Das Gupta's large work on *alaṁkāra* as part of the first volume of *History of Sanskrit Literature : Classical Period* published by Calcutta University in 1947. But it was not a defence of Sanskrit poetics against S. K. De's criticism of it as only a collection of technical manuals for poets.

To the students of Sanskrit the first significant answer to S. K. De's criticism of *alaṁkāra* as but a kind of rhetoric with no relevance to a proper poetic is J. Gonda's article 'The meaning of the word *alaṁkāra*' included in *A Volume of Eastern and Indian Studies in Honour of F. W. Thomas* published in Bombay in 1939. Nine years ago Edwin Gerow disputed with remarkable dialectical prowess the validity of S. K. De's view of *alaṁkāra* in his excellent introduction to his *A Glossary of Indian Figures of Speech* (1971). To S. K. De's assertion that *alaṁkāra* is more concerned with literary devices than with literary imagination Gerow's immensely quotable answer is : "The poet, by virtue of his decision to express himself poetically, adopts the condition of imagination —the figurative mode." I find an anticipation of this view in Daniel H. H. Ingalls' very fine introduction to his English edition of *Subhāṣitaratnakośa* published in 1968. "The science of *alaṁkāra*", Ingalls says in this essay, "is concerned rather with image-building, with shades of similarity and with the technique of overtone or suggestion".

I have taken so long to present some influential scholars'

idea of *alaṁkāra* only to stress the importance of Coomaraswamy's understanding of the concept of *alaṁkāra* in the history of modern poetics. About his theory of art only specialists can speak and there is now a good deal to read on the subject. I think Ray Livingston's *Traditional Theory of Art* (1962) which deals exclusively with Coomaraswamy's philosophy of art is in many ways a profoundly scholarly and perceptive presentation of the essence of that philosophy. Livingston does not go into the concept of *alaṁkāra* and it is possible that when he understood Coomaraswamy's view of it he considered that to be the only sensible view possible. But he had done a very important thing as a student of Coomaraswamy's aesthetic. He has drawn his readers' attention to Coomaraswamy's essay entitled 'A Figure of Speech or A Figure of Thought' which is included in his book *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought* (1946).[1] Perhaps this essay is much less known than his essays like 'Hindu View of Art : Historical', 'Hindu View of Art : Theoretical' included in *The Dance of Shiva* and 'The Theory of Art in Asia', the opening piece of his well-known work *Transformation of Nature in Art* (1934). Livingston affirms that the essay 'A Figure of Speech or A Figure of Thought' contains in brief the essential subject 'of his aesthetic ideas' and sets forth 'quite a complete theory of literature'.

It is in this essay that Coomaraswamy explains his view of *alaṁkāra* as an aesthetic and he weaves that view into the fabric of his general theory of art. He dismisses the idea of *alaṁkāra* as a taxonomy of some literary devices as purbind pedantry. His theory of art is not sustained by *alaṁkāra* alone. He derived a great deal from Plato and from Plotinus, from the early Christian fathers, from the scholastics and particularly from their master Aquinas, from Meister Eckhart, from mediaeval Christian art and from what he knew

[1] Later, it has been included in *Coomaraswamy : Selected Papers* (henceforth *CSP*), Volume 1, edited by Roger Lipsey, published by Princeton University, U.S.A., 1977. *Editor.*

of the art and thought of China and Japan. He not only mastered this vast material as a scholar : he knew how to make that mastery a part of his own intellectual life. This enabled him to arrive at a catholic view of art which may be the foundation of a kind of world poetics although in that poetics there is no support for the aesthetic of the European Renaissance, of nineteenth-century humanism and some of the doctrines of our age.

What is most striking in this essay is that he salvages the concept of *alaṁkāra* from all that obscures our view of it, the ancillary questions of grammar and rhetoric in which it is often enmeshed. In European poetics generations of scholars have so salvaged the poetics of Aristotle from all that seemed to make it appear too Greek to have any meaning for the poetry of other ages and other climes. Coomaraswamy is even prepared to translate the word *alaṁkāra* as rhetoric and relying on what Coleridge calls the 'etymological truth of expression' he argues that in Greek rhetoric 'implies a theory of art as the effective expression of theses'. "There is a very wide difference", he adds, "between what is said for effect and what is said or made to be effective, and must work and would not have been worth saying or making". From this position he very logically proceeds to the idea of rhetoric as that which is concerned with giving truth its form. So to understand Coomaraswamy's concept of *alaṁkāra* we must first understand his concept of rhetoric. And the most lucid statement of his view of rhetoric is to be found in his essay 'A Figure of Speech or A Figure of Thought'. "By rhetoric, we mean, with Plato and Aristotle", he says here, "the art of giving effectiveness to truth. My thesis will be, then, if we propose to use or understand any works of art ... we ought to abandon the term 'aesthetic' in its present application and return to rhetoric".[a] This is a profoundly original statement to make and this prepares us for his explication of the term in another

[a] *CSP*, 1, pp. 14-15. *Editor.*

essay of the same book on *alaṁkāra*. S. N. Das Gupta used the word *vīkshaśāstra* to mean aesthetics ; Coomaraswamy would prefer the word *alaṁkāra*.

Coomaraswamy presents his view of the concept of *alaṁkara* in an article entitled 'Ornament' included in the book called *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*. Here again his approach is philological and what he understands through a philological analysis of the term he further explains with appropriate references to some aspects of cultural anthropology and history of art. "The Indian category of *alaṁkara-ṣāstra*", he[3] says, "corresponds ... to the mediaeval category of rhetoric ... in which eloquence is thought of not as an end in itself or art for art's sake, or to display the artist's skill, but as the art of effective communication". Then going into the etymology of the word *alaṁkāra* he[4] says : "The word is composed of *alam*, 'sufficient' or 'enough' and *kṛ* to 'make". He further cites the use of the word *aram* in Vedic texts in the sense of sufficient or satisfactory. So *alaṁkāra* is not something extraneous or adventitious to poetry : it is that which makes poetry possible and therefore it is something integral with poetry.

I really do not know how university professors explain the term *alaṁkāra* to their class and it is not unlikely that S. K. De's view of it has still great prestige in our academic circles. Yet it may be desirable that we draw the attention of our students to these two plain sentences in Coomaraswamy's essay entitled 'Ornament'[5]. "Ornament is related to its subject as individual nature to essence : to abstract is to denature. Ornament is adjectival; and in the absence of any adjective, nothing referred to by any noun could have an individual *existence*, however it might be in principle."

We must however mention one very distinguished apologist of *alaṁkara*, V. Raghavan, who refers to Coomara-

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 243.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 252.

swamy's view of *alaṁkara* while arguing that in Sanskrit poetics ornament or figure is not an external embellishment, but an essential element of the poetic art. In his essay 'Use and Abuse of *Alaṁkara* in Sanskrit' included in his *Studies in Some Concepts of the Alaṁkara-Śastra* (2nd ed., 1973) Raghavan says that the "semantic history of the word *alaṁkara* since Vedic times shows that the sense of adornment is a development from the original meaning of making a thing fit by imparting a power to it for bringing forth the desired effect". If we are to endeavour to rehabilitate Sanskrit poetics as a system of thought which has something to contribute to the modern man's understanding of the art of poetry, not out of any patriotic considerations, but out of a conviction that it is capable of making such a contribution, we would gain our proper insights into it from Coomaraswamy's observations on *alaṁkara*. His interpretations of the theories of *rasa* and *dhvani* in his essays included in *The Dance of Shiva* and *The Transformation of Nature in Art* are no less important. But they will have a new meaning and a new dimension when they are studied in the appropriate context of his view of the concept of *alaṁkara*. That view has given our *alaṁkara-śastra* the status of a true poetic and has affiliated it to the finest traditions of literary theory in the world.

COOMARASWAMY AND INDIAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY

N. N. BHATTACHARYYA

A GREAT art-historian and art-critic though, Coomaraswamy was never confined to a particular area academically as well as personally. He was truly a universal man with a cosmopolitan outlook. He did not consider the study of art as an end in itself, nor did he believe in art for art's sake. According to him, the study of art in itself is of no value unless it is used as a means to understand the way of life, the pattern of social and cultural developments and the world-view, in their totality, of a given nation. Hence he thought it necessary to correlate the study of art to language, literature, history, anthropology, philosophy, religion and other disciplines.

It is difficult to say whether Coomaraswamy's interest in Indian religious and philosophical studies was effect or reaction of his attempts to view the art of India in its real perspective, or it served as a necessary and essential cause or precondition of his study of art as a way of life. Especially in Indian context, both these aspects stand in reciprocal relation, being different expressions of the same mystery. The art of ancient India is predominantly, if not exclusively, religious. Hence in all his historical treatments of Indian art Coomaraswamy insisted basically on the evolution of Indian religious systems and attempted to interpret the ingredients of the former in terms of a critical understanding of the latter. He was one of the pioneers to point out that the specimens anticipated the characteristics of later Indian religious, ritualistic and philosophical ideas. The limestone figure of the bearded man with eyes fixed on the tip of the nose is certainly a prototype of the *yogī* of later period. The well-known blue faience tablet carrying pictographic

characters at the back and the representation of a cross-legged figure, with kneeling worshippers to right and left, and a Nāga behind it, has been regarded by him as a remarkable anticipation of familar types in later Buddhist art of the historical period. According to him, the Harappans were of Dravidian stock and their religious beliefs and practices, characterized by the concept of *bhakti* or devotion, shaped the later theism of India and contributed to the development of image worship.[1]

Leaving aside the debatable issues of Coomaraswamy's characterization of the Harappan civilization as 'Indo-Sumerian' and his identification of its authors with the Dravidians, credit is to be given to Coomaraswamy for stressing the basic difference between the two main trends of subsequent Indian religious thought and culture—the Vedic and non-Vedic. In fact, in his significant work entitled the *Yakṣas* (pt. I, 1928) he has furnished details of the pre-Vedic and non-Vedic religious beliefs and practices like the cults of the phallus and of the mother-goddess, of Yakshas, Rākshasas, Nāgas and other Nature-spirits and their contributions to the growth of subsequent religious ideas. These cults survived as the suppressed religion of the masses throughout centuries, the popularity of which is proved by the early Yaksha or Yakshī images found at Parkham (Mathura Museum), Besnagar (Indian Museum), Didarganj (Patna Museum) and other places. And further, because of the popular support behind them, they were able to make way even in non-theistic religious systems like Buddhism and Jainism. By contrast, he has

[1] *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, p. 5. Cf. his remark : "Indeed, if we recognize in the Dravidians a southern race, and in the Aryans a northern, it may well be argued that the victory of kingly over tribal organizations, the gradual reception into orthodox religion of the phallus cult and mother-goddess, and the shift from abstract symbolism to anthropomorphic iconography in the period of theistic and *bhakti* development, mark a final victory of the conquered over the conquerors. In particular, the popular Dravidian element must have played the major part in all that concerns the development and office of image-worship, that is *pūjā* as distinct from *yajña*."

shown that early Vedic religion consisted in the propitiation of the personified powers of nature through sacrifice or magical incantations and rituals, which had very little to do with devotion or *bhakti* by which the parallel stream was characterized. It was in the later Vedic age that the two streams met each other yielding a qualitative change marked by the emergence of non-theistic religious systems like Buddhism and Jainism on the one hand and absolutely theistic systems like Vaishṇavism, Śaivism and others. According to Coomaraswamy, religions belonging to the former group rejected Vedism and Vedic rituals on a basically atheistic approach but in course of their development they deified the Buddha, the Jina and their associates, revived the cults of certain popular deities and introduced their image worship, being guided by the pre-Vedic[a] and non-Vedic concept of *bhakti*, popularized by the parallel theistic tradition. Religions belonging to the latter group also rejected Vedism and Vedic rituals from a basically theistic approach, but maintained certain Vedic deities like Vishṇu or Rudra-Śiva as supreme beings and introduced their image worship, permeated by the same spirit of *bhakti*. The functional aspects of both these groups were responsible for introducing an extensive iconism from about the beginning of the Christian era.

Coomaraswamy has written extensively on Vedic and Buddhist religions. His contribution to the study of the historical development of different forms of Indian religious systems is indeed substantial. According to him, the beginnings of Buddhist art should be associated with the memorial monuments (*chaityas*) erected on the sites of the four great events (Nativity, Enlightenment, First Preaching and Decease) of the Buddha's life, and in other places. The process of the deification of the Buddha began as early as the second century B.C. At Bharhut numerous medallions illustrate the Jātaka stories ; reliefs illustrate historical episodes of the Buddha's

[a] It is difficult to say that *bhakti* as such existed in the pre-Vedic times. *Editor.*

life ; and pillars bear in relief the figures of Yakshas, Yakshīs, Nāgas and Nature-spirits of popular cults who are believed to be the defenders of the Buddha's system. The same themes also occur in Sanchi. No Buddha image appears in early Buddhist art. Even in historical scenes his presence is indicated, not by a human figure, but by formal symbols. On the other hand, in the Jātaka representations the sculptors did not hesitate to represent the Bodhisattva in human shape. Coomaraswamy held that the explanation of the absence of the human Buddha figure from the historical scenes appears to lie not in any inability to represent the Master in an appropriate manner, but in the existence of an already familiar method of indicating the great events of his life by means of symbols. The apotheosis of the Buddha had not yet proceeded so far as to necessitate the use of an icon. From this point of view he advanced his theory of the essentially Indian origin of the Buddha image.*

The idea of worshipping Buddha image became popular only after the parallel development of devotional theism. Coomaraswamy maintained that the sense of devotion to a personal god was by no means exclusively Hindu. It affected equally the forms of Buddhist belief, and to a less extent the Jain. This spirit of devotional theism, which was the driving force of the Hindu cults of Vishṇu, Śiva, Śakti, Gaṇapati and Sūrya, brought a veritable transformation in Buddhism which came to be known as Mahāyāna. Not only was the Buddha deified, but a pantheon of Buddhist deities came into existence, in addition to the already well-known Buddhist forms of the Hindu Brahmā and Indra, and the Yakshas and Nāgas, who were admitted to the cult of Buddhism at an earlier period as protectors and assistants. The new-fangled Buddhist gods of the Mahāyāna included the previous human Buddhas, the Dhyānī Buddhas and their spiritual sons, the Bodhisattvas and ultimately the female divinities.

* *Supra*, pp. 60-61.

Coomaraswamy maintained that it was only after the first century A.D. that deities, both Hindu and Buddhist, were represented with four arms. Many-headed and many-handed forms were still later. And that from the Gupta period onwards straight developments of devotional theism centering round Vishṇu, or Śiva, or Devī, or Buddha or Bodhisattva was on the move. The artistic expressions of all these sects found a common language which was revealed alike by the frescoes of Ajanta relating events and miracles of the Buddha's life, along with the Jātaka tales and symbolic representations of some basic conceptions ; by the terra-cotta panels of Śaiva themes on the Bhitargaon temple, and the Vaishnavite reliefs on the cave temple at Udayagiri near Besnagar, on the reliefs at Deogarh in Jhansi, on the series of ancient temples at Aihole and Badami, and so on. This common language is also expressed in subsequent art-activities at Ellora, Elephanta, Mahabalipuram, Bhuvaneswar, Puri, Konarak, Kulu, Kangra and Kashmir where the represented themes are more varied in accordance with the fuller development of mythology, cosmology and the multifarious concepts of intricated theology.

Apart from his works on Indian art-history and his interpretation of the ideals of Indian art in terms of the religio-philosophical ideas and practices, Coomaraswamy made some specialized studies on Indian religion, philosophy and mythology. Directly on the Vedas he has written two books and on Buddhism three, along with a comparative study of Hinduism and Buddhism. In collaboration with Sister Nivedita he published certain myths and legends belonging to both Hinduism and Buddhism[4]. The introduction of this work shows his special viewpoint in regard to the treatment and analysis of mythology. One should not fail to recall in this connection the mastery of Coomaraswamy over the Eddaic literature of the Teutons[5]. And apart from his knowledge

[4] *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists.*

[5] Cf. his translation of the *Voluspa*, London, 1909.

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of the Greek and the Roman mythology, he was well acquainted with the Celtic Mabinogion and the Hebrew Talmud literature. Naturally his viewpoint was comparative which was further facilitated by the evolutionist approach in anthropological studies which dominated the field till the mid-thirties. This school squarely based itself on comparative studies of the tribal survivals in the light of all available evidences from diverse sources of the history of mankind, including materials from ancient literature and mythology, and reviewed the data revealing the same or similar attitude on one particular belief, custom, practice or institution from different sources with a view to finding out the common motive underlying their institutions and establishing their primitive social origins.

Coomaraswamy was influenced by the researches of the evolutionists which enabled him to see in the rituals actual magical mimings of anterior events or phenomena of any kind, performed to achieve certain ends on the basis of the association of ideas relating to the laws of similarity and contiguity. He held that mythologies in original were literary and imaginary reproduction of such magical beliefs and practices and that their symbolic transformations formed ingredients of primitive art. But he did not follow these ideas mechanically. For example, in his treatment of the flood legends* described in the Brāhmaṇas and the Purāṇas and also of those belonging to non-Indian traditions he admitted the probability of their common origin and thought it prudent to interpret the Indian legends in terms of the metaphysical concept of cosmic time, *manvantara*, the transition from one age to another. The dissolution of the world after completing the term of existence and the beginning of a new span of existence are always intervened by a total flood and the arc in that oceanic vastness is symbolic of a patriarchal voyage

* *Coomaraswamy : Selected Papers* (hereinafter *CSP*), II, edited by Roger Lipsey, pp. 398ff.

(*pitṛiyana*). The end of every *kalpa* or span of time, equivalent to a certain extent the Last Judgment of the Christians or the Eddaic *ragna rok*, the dusk of the gods, and the genesis of a new *kalpa* after the intervening inundation, brought about by a patriarch of angelic origin (Manu), have been viewed as a symbolic representation of what is called the doctrine of reincarnation, which is bound up with the notion of latent causality known in Indian philosophical tradition as *adṛishṭa* or *apūrva*, the unseen preconditions of generating effects.

Although the Vedic tradition does not propound the doctrine of reincarnation in its most sophisticated form as do Buddhism and Jainism, the Vedic concept of *manvantara*, the change in cosmic cycles, must have something to do, according to Coomaraswamy, with the later elaborate conceptions of reincarnation, transmigration and metempsychosis. He sought to interpret the Vedic terms and concepts in their real perspective in the light of philological findings and the viewpoints of the traditional commentators like Yāska.[7] In his own words[8] : "In fact, however, the *mantras* and the Latin hymns alike are so closely wrought, their symbolism is employed with such mathematical exactitude, ... that we cannot possibly suppose that their authors did not understand their own words ; it is *we* who misunderstand, if we insist on reading algebra as though it were arithmetic. All that we can learn from literary history is that the doctrines which are taken for granted in the *mantras* were not, perhaps, published until after a certain amount of linguistic change had already taken place ; we may find some new words, but we do not meet with new ideas. It is our own fault if we cannot see that Mitrāvaruṇau, of whom the latter is 'the immortal brother of the mortal' former, are none other than the *apara* and *para* Brahman to whom the Upaniṣads refer as mortal and immortal respectively." Most of the Vedic

[7] Cf. his *A New Approach to the Vedas*, London, 1933. *Editor.*

[8] *CSP*, pp. 166ff.

scholars postulated the gradual development of monotheism in the Vedas evolving out of polytheistic conditions represented by the personified attributes of nature. Coomaraswamy[9] contradicted this view by quoting Yāska's interpretation that "it is because of His great divisibility that they apply many names to Him". Here the single monotheistic principle has given rise to a superficial appearance of polytheism. The conceptions of the identity of the first principle with all its power are abundantly indicated in the Vedic texts including the *Ṛigveda*. Coomaraswamy[10] held that "the *Nirukta* and the *Bṛihaddevatā* were fully justified in saying that the gods are participants in the divine Essence or Spiration" and that Edgerton was quite correct when he concluded that "everything contained at least in the older Upaniṣads, with almost no exceptions, is not new to the Upaniṣads, but can be found set forth, or at least very clearly foreshadowed, in the older Vedic texts." [11]

Not only the Upanishadic doctrines, but the essentials of the Buddhist ideas as well had been traced by him to the earlier Vedas. Oriental philosophies in general and Buddhism in particular were conceived by him as a way out of the mental and intellectual crisis of the West in modern times. He[12] wrote : "At this moment, when the Western World is beginning to realize that it has failed to attain the fruit of life in a society based on competition and self-assertion, there lies a profound significance in the discovery of Asiatic thought, where it is affirmed with no uncertain voice that the fruit of life can only be attained in a society based on the conception of moral order and mutual responsibility. Let me illustrate by a single quotation the marvellous directness and

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[9] *Ibid.*, p. 175.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

[11] *Journal of American Oriental Society*, XXXVI, p. 197.

[12] *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, preface. [Christmas Humphreys, a distinguished writer on Buddhism, regards this book 'as the finest single volume on Buddhism yet published'. Cf. S. Durai Raja Singam, *Remembering and Remembering Again and Again*, p. 23. *Editor.*]

sincerity of the social ethics to the psychology of Buddhism affords its sanction : *Victory breeds hatred, for the conquered is unhappy* ..... It is with gifts such as this that Buddhism, and the Hinduism from which it issues and into which it has again merged, stand over against the world of *laissez faire*, demanding of their followers only the abandonment of all resentment, coveting and dullness, and offering in return a happiness and peace beyond our reasonable understanding." He identified the psychological part of Nibbāna with self-forgetfulness.[15]

Coomaraswamy's endeavour was to illustrate that part of Buddhist thought which had played in the whole development of Asiatic culture. At the same time his purpose was to interpret different aspects of Buddhist thought and culture in relation, on the one hand, to the Brahmanical systems in which they originated and on the other, to those systems of Christian mysticism which afforded the nearest analogies. In his own words : "Gautama teaches us that the marks of this life are imperfection, transience and the absence of any changeless individuality. He sets before us a *summum bonum* closely akin to the Christian mystic conception of 'self-naughting'. Here are definite statements which must be either true or false, and a clearly defined goal which we must either accept or refuse. If the statements be false, and if the goal be worthless, it is of the highest importance that the former should be refuted and the latter discredited. But if the diagnosis be correct and the aim worthy, it is at least of equal importance that this should be generally recognized ; for we cannot wish to perpetuate as the basis of our sociology a view of life that is demonstrably false or a purpose demonstrably contrary to our conception of the good."

Coomaraswamy's works on Buddhism were largely descriptive in nature. He wrote them with a purpose of intro-

[15] *Ibid.*

ducing its wealth to the West. This had not been the case with his Vedic studies which were analytical and technical. His studies on Buddhist art and iconography were guided by historical considerations. One point which we should not fail to recall in this connection is that although his professed purpose was to reveal the past glory of India, Coomaraswamy was not indifferent to the contribution of the West to the field of religion and philosophy. His viewpoint was synthetic. He believed that ideas are more or less similar everywhere, varying not in kind but in degree only ; and even the process of their formulation is also similar in many cases. Most of his religious and philosophical writings, be it on Vedic exemplarism, or on the doctrine of *Ātman* or on the Tantric doctrine of biunity, are replete with parallel Latin quotations from works on Christian theology. The value of the study of comparative religion, he believed, is not certainly to convince that one mode of belief is the preparation for another, or to lead to a decision as to which is the best. As he[14] said : "Comparative religion can demonstrate that all religions spring from a common source .... One can recognize that many formulae are identical in different religions .... But of greater value than this is the clarification that results when the formulae of one tradition are collated with those of another .... What then is clear and full in one tradition can be used to develop the meaning of what may be hardly more than alluded to in another. Or even if in one tradition a given doctrine, has been definitely named, a realization of the significance of this definition may lead to the recognition and correlation of a whole series of affirmations in another tradition, in all of which the same doctrine is implicit, but which had previously been overlooked in their relation to one another."

[14] *CSP*, II, p. 40.

COOMARASWAMY AND INDIAN COINS

A. N. LAHIRI

IN the field of Fine Arts in particular and Indology in general A. K. Coomaraswamy's range of studies was varied and almost all-pervading. There was hardly any source which he did not utilize for his researches. He acquired a broad basic knowledge of Indian coins and was quite conversant with the writings of contemporary numismatists. He made admirable use of numismatic material and, in fact, utilized every bit of useful information that early Indian coins provided to him. He, however, studied coins mainly from the iconographic point of view. What to speak of inscribed coins with broad devices, even earliest archaistic Punch-marked coins yielded rich material for his extensive studies ; and that was because of their symbols, which played an important role in Indian art, specially of the early times.[1]

Coomaraswamy's interesting comments and observations about the Punch-marked coins chiefly relate to the numerous enigmatic symbols which make up their devices. As he visualized, Indian Punch-marked coins were but forerunners of later mural decoration, consisting of formal floral ornament enclosed in framed spaces and depicting cryptic landscapes, characteristic of the creations of nomad races like the Aryans. Punch-marked coins represent types of folk-art in ritual decoration by their depiction of "river landscapes with formal tree, ... symbolic geometrical arrangements of birds, animals and plants". They provide us in an archaistic manner certain

[1] Coomaraswamy utilized the numismatic source in his celebrated work, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (henceforth *HIIA*), Dover Edn., 1965. Figs. in our text given within brackets refer to those on Plate XXX of this book. [Coomaraswamy published an article exclusively devoted to coins entitled 'Notes on Indian Coins and Symbols' in *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift*, N. F. IV, 1927-28. *Editor*]

visual forms, "the essential elements of which is pattern rather than representation".[2]

Coomaraswamy elaborately dealt with symbols, many of which were evidently religious in character and as such played an interesting role in early Indian art. "Such symbols (*rūpa*)", said he[3], "... are found in great variety on the Punch-marked coins (*kāhāpaṇa, kārṣāpaṇa, purāṇa*) (figs. 106—108) which were in general use from about 600 B.C. up to the beginning of Kuṣāṇa period or somewhat later, on the closely related native cast and die-struck coins (figs. 110—115) of the latter part of the same period, and also on some of the Indianised coins of the Indo-Greek and Indo-Parthian kings of the Punjab, *e.g.*, Agathocles." He then spoke of symbols as are invariably seen on the Punch-marked issues, *viz.*, bull's head, human figures (singly or in threes), elephant, horse, bull, dog, cobra, fish, peacock, *chaitya vṛiksha* (railed tree), branch, flower, lotus, sun (circle with rays), moon (crescent), mountain (many varieties with one or more peaks, and with or without the dog, peacock, tree or crescent), river (often with fish), tank, taurine, *nandipada, triratna* or *triśūla, svastika*, double triangle (like a Tāntrik *yantra*), steel-yard, so-called cotton-bale or caduceus, shield (=*triratna* or fire-altar ?), Taxila mark (equal-armed cross, tipped with four circles enclosing dots), Troy mark (three *chhatras* or arrow-heads interspaced with ovals about a central circle, generally regarded as another solar symbol), bow and arrow, pile of balls (=heap of gems ?), and many others.[4] The symbol which he referred to as 'Troy mark'[5] is what we now call the 'six-armed

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[2] *HIIA*, p. 8.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44. Note 1 on p. 43 shows that Coomaraswamy knew all about the symbols of the Punch-marked coins as discussed by earlier or contemporary numismatists.

[4] *HIIA*, p. 45. The list of important symbols is almost complete.

[5] Coomaraswamy refers to this 'Troy mark' as occurring in Western Asiatic art, *HIIA*, p. 11 ; but we do not know where else it occurs. P. L. Gupta has traced some seventy varieties of this symbol, and we have traced some ten more.

symbol', more than eighty varieties of which are seen on thousands of Punch-marked coins discovered since Coomaraswamy wrote. Coomaraswamy, however, noted with interest the absence of 'any sign clearly representing a *stūpa* of any kind'. Earlier scholars, he showed, failed to determine 'the nature of objects represented' by symbols, so much so that what is now universally recognised as 'mountain' had been mistaken for a *stūpa*.[6]

Coomaraswamy made some critical comments on the nature and character of the symbols seen on Punch-marked coins in particular and certain early Indian post-Punch-marked issues in general. "For our purposes", said he[7], "the importance of these symbols, many of which have remained in use to the present day, lies in the fact that they represent a definite early Indian style, amounting to an explicit iconography." He[8] then exemplified the role of the symbols like the tree and the wheel, which at Bhārhut and Sāñchī clearly represented the Buddha (*Bhagavato*) and were worshipped as such. But he knew that the symbols, which had been elements of common use from a hoary antiquity should not always be taken as having Buddhistic, Brahmanical or Jain bearings. "The special religious meanings", said Coomaraswamy[9], "possible for each symbol must be considered in the light of Vedic and Epic references to *avatārs* and attributes, and to later and modern iconography, remembering always that the vocabulary was equally available to all sects, Brāhmaṇs, Buddhists and Jains each employing them in senses of their own."

Coomaraswamy knew well that all the symbols did not have religious bearings. He[10] rightly said that "the heraldic significance, the secular usage by a particular king, city or

[6] *HIIA*, p. 44. [Also *Ost. As. Zeit*, 1927-28, p. 179. *Editor*]
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 45.
[8] *Ibid.*
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 44.
[10] *Ibid.*

community, must be considered in the light of a comparative study of find places, and incidental references to *rāja-aṅka* of particular rulers such as the bull mark of the Bṛhatratha dynasty of Magadha mentioned in the *Mahabharata*, the tiger mark of the kings of Kāverī-pum-paṭṭinam mentioned in the *Paṭṭinappālai*; the later royal emblems used as seals on copperplate grants, and the heraldic usage of symbols on banners and standards".

Naturally enough, Coomaraswamy weighed the value of the oft-quoted *Visuddhimagga* passage, which referring to *kārshāpaṇas* or the 'common' 5-symbol silver Punch-marked coins, "states that an experienced banker would be in a position to distinguish at what village, borough, town, mountain or river bank they were issued, and by what mint-master". Scholars who studied this passage earlier than Coomaraswamy obviously realized that such specialized knowledge about the place of issue and the mint-master issuing them could only have been possible with a special knowledge about the symbols that appear on the Punch-marked issues. But Coomaraswamy's clear and categorical statement about the significance of the obverse (*i.e.*, Primary) symbols and the reverse (*i.e.*, Secondary) symbols is remarkably interesting for his time. "In general", he[11] truly observed, "the obverse marks seem to be those of the issuing authority, the reverse signs those of private bankers and merchants".

However, there were some among the numerous symbols seen on Punch-marked coins which had religious bearings. "Indian religious symbols", said Coomaraswamy[12], "appear not only as before on native punch-marked coins, but on various coins of Greek and Indo-Scythian kings from Agathocles (ca. 100 B.C.) onwards. In many cases, these

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45. What Coomaraswamy said here is fully corroborated by our close critical study of the obverse and reverse symbols of the Punch-marked coins. *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India* (henceforth *JNSI*), XXXVIII, pp. 19-30.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 49. For a coin of Agathocles showing the Hill and Tree symbols, see A. N. Lahiri, *Corpus of Indo-Greek Coins* (henceforth *CIGC*), p. 78.

symbols had, no doubt, a Buddhist significance but all are common to Buddhist and Brahmanical usage, and many represent the deities of the cities in which they were struck (*e.g.*, the elephant-deity of Kapiśa, and the bull-deity, probably Śiva, of Puṣkalāvatī)". As he believed, some at least of the symbols or broad devices seen on ancient Indian coins—either of the indigenous authorities or of foreign rulers—had some definite significance relating to the places of issue.

Coomaraswamy noted that early foreign rulers like the Greek, Scythian, Parthian, Kushāṇa and Hūṇa chiefs came under the influence of Indian religions and consequently depicted on their coins symbols and devices of unmistakable Indian import. We may here demonstrate Coomaraswamy's contentions by a number of illustrations. The Indo-Greek king Agathokles struck some square copper[13] coins with the figures of the Saṁkarshaṇa-Balarāma and the Vāsudeva aspects of the Vaishṇava cult.[14] The Indo-Scythian king Azilises depicted on a series of his silver coins the well-known scene of *abhisheka* (coronation) of Lakshmī.[15] Some scholars believe that the trident-bearing god on the silverish issues of Gondophares, the Indo-Parthian king, was but god Śiva of the Indian pantheon.[16] The Kushāṇa king Vima Kadphises showed on his extensive gold and copper issues the Figure of Śiva holding his trident with or without his mount Nandin, which device was later on continued, specially by a later successor Vāsudeva.[17]

Coomaraswamy expressed his clear views on certain devices of Indian coins and at the same time dispelled some

[13] [Bronze. *Editor*]

[14] See *JNSI*, XXXV, p. 76, Pl. VII, 2 and 1.

[15] See R. B. Whitehead, *Punjab Museum Catalogue* (henceforth *PMC*), I, Pl. XIII, 332.

[16] See *ibid.*, p. 151, Pl. XV. 43. Even though Whitehead calls the trident-bearing god Śiva, we would like to identify him with Greek Poseidon, since he bears also the palm-branch, which is borne by Poseidon, not Śiva.

[17] See Whitehead, *op. cit.*, I, Pl. XVII, 31 (Vima Kadphises) and Pl. XIX, 209 (Vāsudeva). According to Coomaraswamy, the Śiva device on Vāsudeva's coins is similar to the Śiva image from Charsadda (*HIIA*, p. 55).

misconceptions about the interpretations and identifications of some other devices. He clarified the positions of a few devices with structural motifs.[18] He identified the so-called square *stūpa* on the coins of the Kuṇinda chief Amoghabhūti with that type of 'railed parasol *caitya*, which occurs on Bodhgaya railings, Cunningham 3 (i.e., *Mahabodhi* or *the Great Temple at Bodhgaya*, A. N. L.), pl. IX, no. 14'.[19] He duly noted that structural shrines or pavilions appear on the Audumbara coins (figs. 116, 117) about the beginning of the Christian era...".[20] He showed that pavilions also find their places on Pāṇḍyan coins. Similarly, he[21] drew our attention to "a pavilion with a double ornamented plinth, and enshrining figures of Skanda, Viśākha and Mahāsena that are represented on a coin of Huvishka (fig. 126A)". It is not clear, however, as to what he meant by the 'stūpa base' on coins of Azes[22], also in the same context.

The enigmatic female figure with flowing robes appearing on two identical series of square bilingual copper coins of the Indo-Greek kings Pantaleon and Agathokles was often described as 'Dancing Girl'.[23] But Coomaraswamy[24] did not think that she was an ordinary human being, but a Yakshī, Devata or Vṛikshakā.

Interestingly enough, the coins of the Indo-Greek kings, who are known exclusively from their coins, attracted his attention. He[25] rightly observed that they were at first

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[18] *HIIA*, p. 45, note 2. Also Kalyan Kumar Dasgupta, *A Tribal History of Ancient India : A Numismatic Approach*, p. 101.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 45, note 2 and p. 48. Dasgupta, *op. cit*, pp. 62-63.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 48, note 6.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 50. [Coomaraswamy does not refer to any stupa-base on the coins of Azes. What he says is that "stupa bases of the Śaka period, associated with coins of Azes, appear at Taxila". *Editor.*]

[23] V. A. Smith (*Catalogue of Coins in the Indian Museum*, I, p. 10, Agathocles, No. 1) and R. B. Whitehead (*op. cit.*, I, p. 16, No. 35) described her as 'Dancing girl'. For other views see *CIGC*, p. 78, Type 10.

[24] *HIIA*, p. 64, note 1. [J. N. Banerjea identifies her with Aśvamukhī Yakshī of Indian literature. *Development of Hindu Iconography*, p. 111. *Editor*]

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

executed "in a purely classical style, and subsequently Indianised, and by small objects, none of which are of a Buddhist or Hindu character". But he[26] noted that the royal figures of Kushāṇa coins are "of purely Indian style of art", though "the costume consisting of pointed cap, tunic, open coat, trousers and high heavy boots, is Central Asian".

Coomaraswamy threw welcome light on the vexed problem of the origin of the Buddha image, and while doing so he duly stressed on the evidence of coins. Some scholars recognized the Buddha in the seated posture on some small copper "coins (fig. 119) of a king Kadapha, who is probably to be identified with Kadphises I". Coomaraswamy, however, took it to be 'a king, of the early Kuṣāṇa type'[27], not the Buddha. He also doubted the view of Longworth Dames that "the much earlier seated broad-shouldered cross-legged figure on the reverse of a coin of Maues (Smith, 6, p. 12, and pl. VIII, 4) was a figure of Buddha".[28]

Now, as we see the device of the Maues coin, datable to about the first quarter of the first century B.C., has generally been taken to represent the 'king', and the identification is almost correct.[29] A 'king' is almost similarly depicted on another copper coin of Azes (I ?), who was the successor of Maues.[30] Then, as to the seated figure on the small obscure type of coins of Kadapha-Kadphises (I), it looks like the seated Buddha figure, but there is nothing positive which may enable us to identify it with the Buddha. The standing figure on the reverse of the coin has been identified with Zeus, and it is hardly likely that the obverse should bear another deified being like the Buddha. In fact, if we follow

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[26] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] A. Cunningham (*Coins of the Śakas*, Indian edn., p. 31, Pl. III. 17), P. Gardner (*B. M. Cat.*, p. 7, Nos. 21-24, Pl. XVII. 5) and R. B. Whitehead (*op. cit.*, I, p. 102, No. 29 and Pl. X. 31) uniformly called the seated figure 'King'. V. A. Smith (*op. cit.*, I, p. 40, No. 12, Pl. VIII. 4) alone described it as 'deity or king'.

[30] *PMC*, I, p. 116, No. 188 and Pl. XI, 195.

the trend of the coin-issuing career of this first Kushāṇa king (variously called Kozoula Kadphises, Kozola Kadaphes in Greek and Kujula Kasa, Kayala Kara Kapasa, Kuyula Kaphsa, Kuyula Kadapha in Prakrit), we cannot miss the fact that he had no numismatic tradition of his own and he took recourse to widespread copying of others' coins : he successively imitated the coins of the Indo-Greek king Hermaeus[31], the Indo-Scythian satrap Zeionises[32] and the Roman monarch Augustus (?[33]). It is, therefore, quite possible that the seated cross-legged figure in question might well have been a copy of the royal figure on some other king's coins. Anyway, we strongly endorse Coomaraswamy's view about the origin of the Buddha image that the anthropomorphic representation of the Buddha started with the great Kushāṇa monarch Kanishka I,[34] as evident by his gold and copper coins.

We thus see that though not a professional numismatist himself, Coomaraswamy as an art-critic made some remarkable studies of early Indian coins, and his views are of considerable interest to serious students of Indian numismatics.*

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[31] *CIGC*, p. 142, Types 7 and 8.

[32] Cf. Zeionises, the Bull and Lion coins (*PMC*, I, p. 158, Pl. XVI, 84) and Kujula Kadphises, the Bull and Camel coins (*ibid.*, p. 180, Pl. XVII, 18).

[33] *PMC*, I, p. 181, Pl XVII, 24.

[34] See, *e.g.*, *PMC*. I, p. 214, Pl. XX. VII for Kanishka's gold coin with the standing figure of the Buddha bearing the name-label BODDO in Greek letters. [*Supra*, p. 61. *Editor*]

* My friend Dr. K. K. Dasgupta, the editor of the present volume, has written an interesting paper entitled 'Ananda Coomaraswamy and Indian Numismatics' in *JNSI*, XL, pp. 6-8.

COOMARASWAMY AND INDIAN NATIONALISM

S. Durai Raja Singam

I am certain that in the history of the Indian Freedom Movement, Ananda Coomaraswamy will have found a place as an Indian Nation Builder. He espoused the cause of Indian freedom and happily lived to see India become independent. Unlike the politician, he aimed at winning not only political freedom but also intellectual, moral and cultural freedom. He felt and said that mere political independence will not eventually mean much without the proper development of Indian culture. He was a silent fighter for Indian independence and an Indian Nation Builder in its truest sense.

His thoughts and ideas, which are very different from what passes today in free India, will be found in five books : *Borrowed Plumes* (Kandy, Industrial School, 1905), *The Deeper Meaning of the Struggle* (Broad Campden, Essex House, 1907), *Message of the East* (Madras, 1908), *Essays in National Idealism* (Colombo and Madras, 1909), and *Art and Swadeshi* (Madras, 1911). But the influence these books had on the Indians of sixty years ago, and later, have been profound, deep and abiding.[1]

To Coomaraswamy, 'nationalism' meant search for self-realization, and the road to education. "Nations", he said, "are created by artists and poets, and not by merchants and politicians. In art lies the deepest life principles".[2] In his

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[1] For example, see the articles by J. Vijayatunga and V. B. Kulkarni in *Homage to Ananda Coomaraswamy : A Garland of Tributes*, ed. by S. Durai Raja Singam. It may be noted here that in the last volume of the three-volume book, published by *Ganesh and Company* in Madrass, entitled *Indian National Builders* Coomaraswamy was given an honoured place among other great men of India like Gandhiji and Rabindranath.

[2] *Essays in National Idealism*.

Message of the East, he showed clearly how Indian thought and culture had been gradually transforming European thought and culture, how the Western nations were approaching in every department a certain critical period, how the far-reaching developments of commercialism were undermining their own stability, and how the East had indeed revealed a new world to the West which would be the inspiration of a 'Renaissance' more profound and far-reaching than that which resulted from the rediscovery of the classic world of the West. The deepest ideas in Coomaraswamy's concepts of Nationalism was that Nationalism is a duty, that Nationalism should be rooted in a lofty idealism, and that its highest self-expression is in literature, art, philosophy and religion. He affirmed also that without attaining these aims, India would not be able to be industrially great or politically free. For instance, he averred : "There can be no true realisation of political unity until Indian life is again inspired by the unity of the national culture." He also underlined the importance of Nationalism in education. It is explicit in his statement : "More necessary than all the labours of politicians is National Education." Elaborating this point he said : "Every Government and Missionary college and school must be replaced by colleges and schools of our own, where young men and women are taught to be true Indians. So long as Indians are prepared to accept an education, *the aim of which is to make them English in all but colour*—and at present they do in the main accept such education—they cannot achieve a national unity." And Gandhiji appears to have realized this fundamental fact when he inaugurated his Basic Education (Nai Talim) scheme in which he insisted on education being craft-centered and being imparted through the mother-tongue.

Coomaraswamy also denounced that vague and sentimental cosmopolitanism which weakens and eventually destroys nationalism, without effectively establishing itself anywhere. He protests against "a premature and artificial cosmopolitanism which would destroy a nation, *as modern education destroys*

in individuals, the special genius of each". We must develop our Indian *svabhāva* (nature) for our own glory and for the welfare of the world as a whole.

Indeed, Coomaraswamy's eminence as a prophet of nationalism covered all aspects. He had a firm belief in national education as being the only inspirer of genuine and successful nationalism. He combated the view that the national movement is a result of English education and said : "The facts are otherwise. If Indians are still capable of self-government, it is in spite of all the anti-national tendencies of a system of education that has ignored or despised almost every ideal informing the national culture."

Jawaharlal Nehru[8], in his *Autobiography*, quotes Coomaraswamy, and writes : "The Indian survey of this period lays stress on many other factors, and points out the injury, material and spiritual, that foreign rule has brought us. The view-point is so different that sometimes the very thing that is commended by the British is condemned by Indians. As Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy writes : 'One of the most remarkable features of British rule in India is that the greatest injuries inflicted upon the Indian people have the outward appearances of blessings'."

Coomaraswamy emphasized the Indian method of memorizing in education and the Indian emphasis on wisdom and ethics as opposed to mere knowledge. He had no patience with those who extol the virtues of mere reading and writing as factors in culture. He pointed out how in Ceylon anglicization with a vengeance had already taken place in the life of the people. He humorously remarked that "the modern examination system is also a memory system, and as such is inferior to the old, inasmuch as information is merely got up for the immediate purpose and afterwards forgotten". He eulogized the value of the Indian epics as instruments of culture.

[8] Chapter LIV, 'The Record of British Rule', p. 433.

Coomaraswamy's views in regard to the place of the Swadeshi spirit in nationalism are equally relevant. He denounced again and again the increasing anglicization of tastes. Once he observed : "The imitation of European ways of living, whether in respect of dress, food, architecture or what not, has led to the adoption of many European luxuries which are quite unnecessary and sometimes positively injurious .... probably ninety per cent of European articles purchased by Indians are either ugly or useless or both. The rich offend as badly as the poor, indeed more so, as they can afford to buy a larger quantity of useless and ugly things." He attacked in particular the importation of western musical instruments—the piano, violin, harmonium and gramophones, "the universal popularity of which is ample testimony to the degradation of Indian taste in recent times".

Hans Kohn[4] describes Ananda Coomaraswamy as a Builder of the Indian Nation. He quotes Coomaraswamy comparing the "increasing contrast between extremes of wealth and poverty, the unemployed and many other urgent problems ... vulgarity and selfishness," of Europe to "the message ... of the unity of all life, of synthesis, and the universal self," offered by the East.

Ananda Coomaraswamy did not merely advocate the freedom of India as a national right. He demonstrated how India's freedom was essential to the freedom of the world. And he set for this free India a national responsibility to be fulfilled—to be free, to be Indian, so that all those things which India can give toward the fulfilment of the universal self may be preserved in a living culture, there for all the world to model upon. Where others were content merely to demand the freedom of India as a nation, Ananda Coomaraswamy was one of the few who helped India to build a real Nation, a Nation with duty only she could fulfill.

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[4] Hans Kohn, *History of Nationalism in the East*, London, 1929.

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Correction : Please substitute *farther* by *further* (p. 55, l. 2) and *Indian Numismatics* by *Indian Coins* (p. 67, fn. 41, l. 4). Also please read A Centenary Volume on the fly-leaf.

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